



Maria Island National Park

THE ISTHMUS AND POINT LESUEUR



During geological history Maria Island has probably, at one time or another, been two separate islands, but today the two parts are joined by a sandy spit or bar, termed an isthmus. An overnight walk staying at either French's Farm or Encampment Cove is the best way to enjoy the beaches of The Isthmus and gives you an opportunity to explore the ruins at Point Lesueur. The 3 hour walk to French's Farm can be made via the inland track, which takes you through shrubby forest, or, by the coastal route. French's Farm is a minimal impact camping area. This means that there are no facilities for fires and fuel stoves must be taken. A water tank is located beside the shearing shed. From here it is an extra 45 minutes to the camping ground at Encampment Cove. Here fires may only be lit in the designated fireplaces. It is important to remember that in summer fire restrictions may be enforced and fuel stoves should be used. At both campgrounds the supply of water is limited and in summer you are advised to take your own.

French's Farm one way: 3 hours

Encampment Cove one way: 3 ³/₄ hours

French's Farm

Here you will find a simple weatherboard house with an old shearing shed and stock yard nearby. After the demise

of the cement works of the industrial era (1920-1930), Maria Island reverted to a quiet farming period. Amongst the farmers living on the Island were the Robey's on the south island and the French's near the Isthmus. One of the problems faced by farmers on the island was transportation of their stock to and from the mainland. Sheep and cattle often roamed freely and when rounded up were apt to be a little on the wild side. Boats were anchored offshore and the animals lifted on board. Often the shipping company charged an extra fee for handling the 'wild' cattle.

The Isthmus

From French's Farm, a one hour walk heading south along the track towards Robey's Farm will bring you to McRae's Isthmus, a narrow neck of sand with sweeping beaches on either side. This is a very fragile environment being constantly worked and reshaped by the action of the sea. In Tasmania it remains as the only one of its kind that has not been disturbed by the invasion of exotic species. You can return to French's Farm walking along the beach on the western side. Rejoin the road via a track just behind a small lagoon at the northern end of the beach. The round trip takes 2 hours.

Point Lesueur

From Encampment Cove a round trip of 1 1/2 - 2 hours will take you to the convict ruins, which once made up the Long Point Probation Station. Many places on Maria Island were originally named by the French expedition of Nicholas Baudin (1802) who circumnavigated and mapped the island. Point Lesueur was renamed Long Point during the British colonial years but has now reverted back to its French name.

1. Encampment Cove

From the cove head up past the hut on the hill.

2. Kintail

On your left are the remains of a cottage reputed to have been Kintail, the residence of Diego Bernacchi's sister. This was probably a weatherboard house with bluestone footings and brick chimneys. You can still see a few remnants of a garden. From here veer off to the right to join with a track which winds its way up and over the hill.

3. The Separate Apartments

The convict settlement at Long Point was established in 1845 as a probation station for convicts who had already served part of their sentences, "without incurring the displeasure of the powers that be". Hence it was a place where discipline was less severe, its location having been chosen for the availability of good farming land. In 1846 the construction of 34 separate apartments was commenced, although evidence suggests that probably only 21 were ever built and occupied. From the crest of the hill you should be able to see some red brick ruins. These remaining cells are all that is left of the



separate apartments and the probation station. Looking at them, it is hard to imagine that in 1847, 336 men were accommodated here. The cells had earth floors with whitewashed interiors and opened onto a compound. The buildings were of poor quality, and quickly became rundown. This, in combination with the lack of a good water supply, led to the station being abandoned in 1850.

4. The Barn & Mill

Further up the hill in a direct line from the cells are the ruins of an old barn and some other unidentified

structures, built sometime between 1845 and 1846. If you look around you will see a rectangular pit lined with sandstone blocks. The function of this is unknown, but it is possible it was used as a sheep dip. Amongst the regrowth you may also come across a circular depression with some sandstone slabs and brickwork in the centre. This is all that remains of the windmill.

5. Dunbabin homestead

In 1869, after the abandonment of the probation station, the Dunbabin family took up a lease on the area and farmed it for the next seven years. Down the hill you can see a line of big trees, probably built as a wind shelter earlier this century. On the other side are the ruins of the Dunbabin homestead. In building this house and other structures, the Dunbabins recycled much of the remaining material from the convict era.

6. Wetlands

From these ruins you can see Bloodstone Point, Return Point, and a road leading past a series of lagoons. Take this road on your return trip, keeping an eye out for the variety of water birds on the lagoon to your left.

7. Junction

Eventually the road comes to a junction. Turn to the right to return to Encampment Cove. This road follows Chinaman's Bay, so named because during the 1870s there was a small community of Chinese fishermen here collecting abalone and other shellfish

Bloodstone Point

This short walk takes 1 1/2 - 2 hours return from Encampment Cove. Leave Encampment Cove as if returning to French's Farm. After about 15 minutes you will come to a turn-off to your left to the convict cells at Point Lesueur. Do not take this. After a few more minutes take an unsignposted turn off to your left. This track winds through grassy tussocks to the sand dunes, and up over the sand dunes to Bloodstone Beach. Turn left and walk along the beach until you come to Bloodstone Point. The red rock which comprises this point is called laterite and is formed under special climatic conditions in tropical regions, indicating that about 10 to 20 million years ago Maria Island had a tropical climate. During a wet season, water leaches through the dolerite bedrock, picking up minerals, in this case iron. Normally this solution is washed away. However if a dry season then follows, the water is drawn back up to the surface by capillary action, where it evaporates leaving insoluble mineral salts (laterite), behind. Aboriginal people from the Oyster Bay tribe used this deposit to paint their hair and bodies. During the years of the cement works it was also used for cement production. **Return the way you came.**