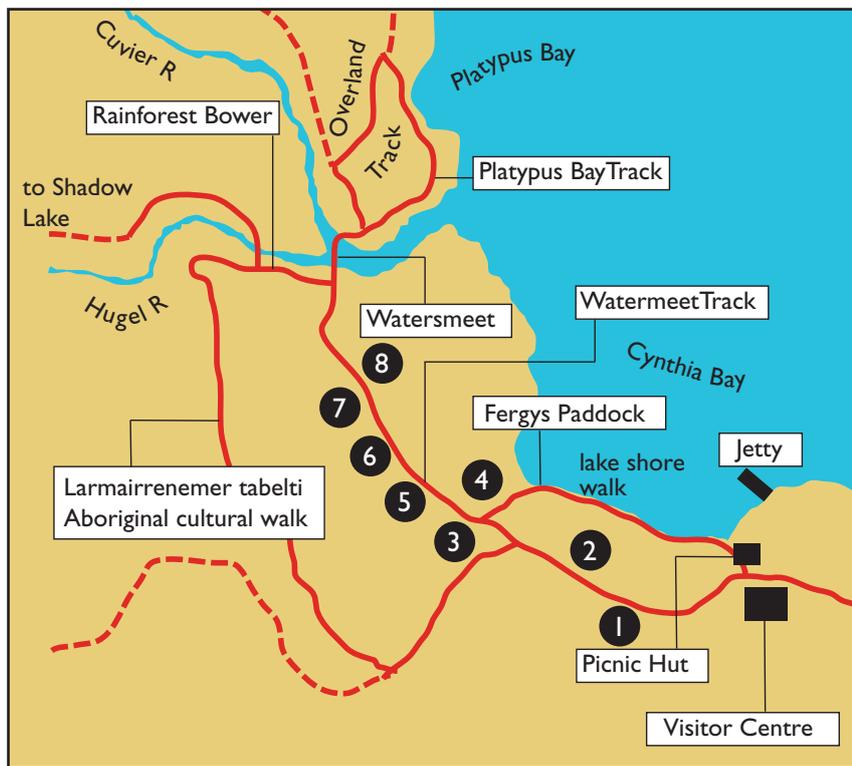




Lake St Clair SHORT WALKS



the ice. The track you are walking on is made up of rocks that have been dropped from a melting glacier 10-20 thousand years ago.

The next post is on your left at the start of the Mt Rufus track.

3. Buttongrass sedgeland

Buttongrass is usually found growing on poorly drained, peaty and fairly acidic soils of low fertility. Have a close look in the area and you will find a variety of other plants growing among the buttongrass clumps.

4. Fergys Paddock

Site 4 is back along the main track to Watersmeet. Fergys Paddock is a campsite for walkers. It was named after Albert Fergusson who was the first ranger at Lake St Clair. He became known to many bushwalkers who delighted in his unique personality, friendly welcome, tall stories and knowledge of the bush.

Watersmeet Nature Trail

This is a short, easy walk, which will take you about 45 minutes return. The track follows an old road that was constructed to allow for limited logging after bushfires in the area in the 1960s. It is 1.7 km each way, and culminates at Watersmeet, where the Hugel and Cuvier Rivers meet.

The numbers on the pamphlet correspond to the numbered posts along the way.

1. Banksias

Banksias flower from spring to early winter. They provide food for animals all year round. During the winter the nectar is sought by many animals, including possums and honeyeaters. Black cockatoos gnaw through the cones with their strong beaks and feed on the seeds inside.

2. The Ice Age

This large rock is a glacial erratic, left behind by a glacier. Most of the Lake St Clair area was altered by glaciation during past ice ages. Lake St Clair, the deepest freshwater lake in Australia, was formed from the gouging effect of

5. Fire

Stop here beside the old logging ramp. The dead trees to your left are the result of a severe fire that swept through this area in 1965, burning its way up Mt Rufus. Most of the adult eucalypts in the area were killed by the fire. The intense heat split the woody seed capsules open, releasing the seeds onto the rich ash bed below. These began to germinate shortly after the fire and grew well in the fertile soil.

6. What are burls?

The dead tree just to the left of the numbered post has a large burl or bulbous growth on it. Just underneath the bark of trees is the living tissue. If a branch breaks off, this living tissue is exposed like a sore, and fungi and other micro-organisms infect the tree's cells. To combat the attack, the tree produces a large number of cells that help keep the fungi out of its main system. This mass production of cells may be compared to scar tissue or cancer tumours in animals.

7. Lateral roots

These eucalypts fell over in 1978 after a severe storm. You can now see the spreading lateral roots. These trees couldn't root deeply on such shallow rocky soil so the lateral roots spread to enable them to get sufficient moisture, nutrients and physical support.

8. Tree hollows

When a fire burns past a tree a partial vacuum may form on the opposite side and hot air rushes in creating an intense heat. This means that the tree becomes more severely burnt on one side. Also contributing to the burning are branches and debris that fall and accumulate against the base of the trunk. Tree hollows provide homes for various animals such as brush-tailed possums, green rosellas and numerous spiders and insects.

Watersmeet

When you have reached the bridge you are at Watersmeet. Here the Hugel and Cuvier Rivers join and feed into Lake St Clair. Many of the streams in western Tasmania have a characteristic brown colour. This is due to tannins, which leach from plant roots and soil in the buttongrass plains, and flow into the waterways. You can drink the water.

Finishing your walk

To complete the Watersmeet Trail, walk back the way you came to Cynthia Bay. If you would like to explore the area a little further, you can cross the bridge and walk around the Platypus Bay Track. Turn left and spend ten minutes exploring the rainforest bower or continue on from the rainforest bower for another 40 minutes to walk the Woodland Nature Trail.

Rainforest Bower

This low-lying area has not been burnt by wildfire for many hundreds of years so rainforest has had sufficient time to develop. The dominant tree is myrtle, while celery-top pine is also common.

The overlapping branches and leaves are so dense that very little light reaches the forest floor. Ferns grow where small breaks in the canopy allow a splash of light through. In the darker spots, mosses and lichens cover logs and fallen branches.

Holes in the ground are made by freshwater yabbies, which burrow deep into the mud. Also watch for the male pink robins. They are fairly common in this damp habitat and their pink chests add a striking flash of colour to the rainforest.

Platypus Bay

The track to Platypus Bay is a 30 minute return walk from Watersmeet Bridge. This track follows the Cuvier River to its mouth at the lake. The track then curves around the edge of the lake. Platypus are sometimes seen in this area. The best time is early morning or late afternoon. Patience, luck, and quietness all have a hand in successful platypus observation.

Further along the track you will come to a beach area where the remains of a wrecked barge can be seen when the water level is low. The barge was used during the construction of the hydro-electric scheme on the lake in 1937. It was towed to this site in about 1955 and has gradually broken into pieces. Wooden planks, steel rods and concrete blocks have also broken away and lie scattered in the bay. The area is therefore hazardous for swimmers. Fergys Paddock is recommended for those wanting a swim.

The prominent buildings across the lake, including the pumphouse, were also once part of the hydro-electric scheme. The area is now being considered for tourist accommodation.

From the lake, the track goes up the hill to meet the Overland Track. Turn left at the junction to return to Watersmeet, and then follow the track back to Cynthia Bay.

'Larmairremener tabelti' Aboriginal cultural walk

The full circuit including the Watersmeet Track is about one and a half hours walk. Take the Watersmeet Track, and at the track junction turn left and follow the signs to the 'Larmairremener tabelti' Aboriginal cultural walk. This walk contains a wide variety of vegetation, including banksias, buttongrass, tea-tree thickets, Tasmanian waratahs, rainforest ferns, and towering eucalypt stags. The latter were ravaged by bushfires in the 1960s.

The track follows moraines, which are ridges formed by retreating glaciers during the ice ages. Moraines influence the vegetation types in the area with open woodlands occurring on the well-drained moraines and tea-tree and buttongrass communities occurring in the wetter areas between the moraines.

After reaching a viewpoint above the Hugel River, the track descends gently to the rainforest area and rejoins the Watersmeet Track where the Hugel and Cuvier rivers meet.

On your way back

An alternative to returning by the Watersmeet Track, depending on the level of the lake, is to go through Fergys Paddock, turn right, and then go back along the beach to Cynthia Bay.