

Tasmania: Swimcart Beach to Devonport

Stage 4 June 2018

This next stage of travel took us to both new and familiar places. It includes a new special camp site as well as fascinating visits to places on the East Coast like Port Arthur and Huonville. And finally, it takes us back to Devonport to board the Spirit of Tasmania and come back to the mainland.



Frosty morning at Chudleigh

Tassie Camps

This stage started on 26 May .



When we left the town of St Helens we were going to a very special camp site, and one which we had heard about before arriving in Tasmania. Swimcart Beach is completely free and located about 12 kms North up the coast from St Helens. As I needed good phone coverage for work, we had carefully checked the site out prior to arriving and knew it was OK. The sites along the beach are all drop dead gorgeous and right on the beach. As it was Winter, and there were not so many travellers around, there were several spots we could fit onto and we soon had what I think was the best spot on the whole beach. Our van was facing the beach and we had a view of the most amazing blue water and white, white beach. And that surf thundered day and night!

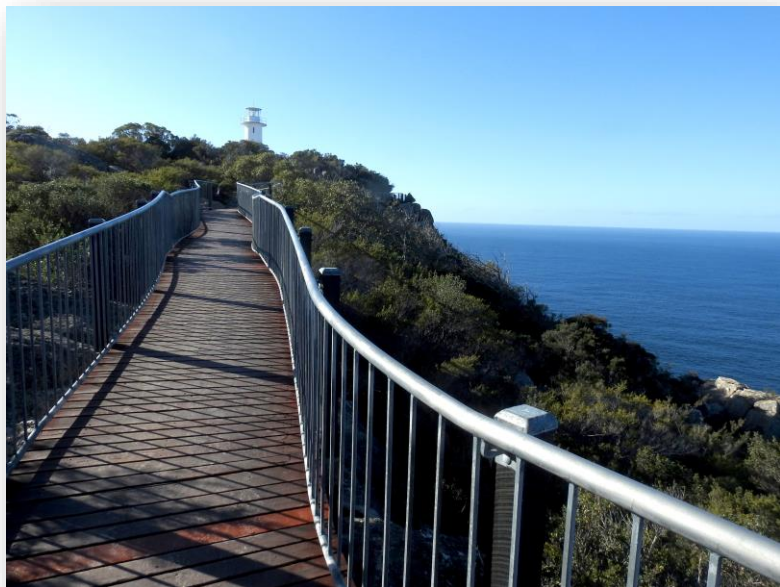
It was a real bonus to find that sites like this were not as crowded as we believed them to be in the warmer months,

and although it was quiet, there were still others like ourselves milling around still. What did intrigue me though was the tendency of people to keep their distance and not really engage with others. When we travel in outback regions we find folk generally come over to say hello and will be found socialising around happy hour drinks. To some extent the cooler weather played a part in this in Tasmania, with most of us retreating inside to the warmth of the van in the afternoon.

The weather was warmer here than I expected but I guess being on the coast kept the temperatures a little higher.

We spent five nights here at Swimcart and enjoyed day trips out and about to other camp sites along the coast and into town for coffee and lunch. I thoroughly enjoyed Pyengana Cheese factory for lunch, coffee and cheese...in fact I enjoyed it so much I went back twice! And we drove up the coast to another camp site called Policeman's Point, which was nice too, but a little more isolated. That is a major plus as far as we are concerned normally, but for this week's work I needed the phone reception we had enjoyed back near St Helens.

From Swimcart we moved on to the South and thought Freycinet National Park sounded lovely. It is indeed scenic around that region. But our van was too big to fit into the national park camp sites. That was a pity as they are located in a beautiful area and not far from the attractions. So we



headed over to the campsite provided by the Freycinet Golf Club. This basic camp site provides simply a nice gravel and grassed area to camp, and a nearby tap for water. But it is near to the national park and was handy for us to have a look at the park, albeit fairly briefly. As the weather was sunny and we had access to water, we managed to get a load of washing done, a bonus.

Freycinet National Park consists of knuckles of granite mountains, all but surrounded by azure bays and white sand beaches. The dramatic and distinctive peaks of the

Hazards welcome you as you enter the park. Freycinet is effectively two eroded blocks of granite - the Hazards and the Mt Graham/Mt Freycinet sections of the peninsula - joined by a sand isthmus.

We really should have done more walks there and I would schedule longer time there on any future trip. As it is, we did take a trip out to the lighthouse at Cape Tourville. The lighthouse at Cape Tourville was constructed in 1971 to replace the inaccessible Cape Forestier Lighthouse which was

decommissioned the same year. The lighthouse was constructed as an automatic light and was never manned. There is a boardwalk which takes you around the cape and affords quite spectacular views. The sand here is a crisp white and the ocean the bright sparkly blue you get when there are such white beaches. It reminded me of Esperance in WA.

We had found the East coast to not only be warmer than the West but also provided for some spectacular camping. A camp spot we found on our last day in the area was earmarked for future trips; Friendly Beaches. Individual sites there are nestled into the vegetation in a loop around a drop toilet, near the beach and it is completely free.

From Freycinet we needed to go further South down the coast to be nearer to Hobart. I had a



vague idea we would go into the city and do some sightseeing, but it occurred to us that although it is no doubt a unique city, we really had come to Tasmania for the wilderness and coastal experiences. And so we really did not do much in Hobart other than looking at Constitution Dock.

However, being around Hobart did allow us to spend a day at Port Arthur. I do wish we had had time to spend a couple of days there but we saw everything we wanted to and enjoyed a relatively uncrowded time there due to it being the Winter months.

Of course, Port Arthur is a deeply significant place for a range of reasons, not the least the events of April 1996. But the history of this penal institution is the main reason people come to visit and to consider the harsh conditions in which prisoners were kept. I found it a serene place which seems to have accepted its past and made peace with its history. And it had a rare beauty.

While in the area near Port Arthur and Hobart, we stayed at the RV rest stop at Sorell, a small town North East of Hobart. The town warmly welcomes visitors and provides this nice quiet location to stay for up to five days. It had water and a dump point within easy walking distance of town so we had everything we needed. We did a number of day trips out of Sorell and found we enjoyed our stay here. Also we caught up with a fellow Kedronning couple, David and Karen, who we had met at Swimcart beach. They were staying here too but as they were out and about until late

each day we really saw very little of them. They were on a tighter timeframe than us and fitting a lot into a short time.

From Sorell we needed to head generally North as we would need to be in or near Devonport and the ferry terminal in a week or so. A leisurely route was planned out, taking us up the Midland Highway and to Kempton (again), Oatlands and Chudleigh.

Kempton is the small town we stayed at a month or so previously and which provides a powered site with nearby water for \$10 a night donation. As we needed to wash sheets etc we headed there and got the machine going as soon as we arrived. Winter is a great time to travel for a whole range of good reasons but getting washing dry is not one of them. However, we had sunny dry days both days there and that helped. We also used this time to nip over to Richmond and visited the model village of Hobart, which I had been previously unaware existed, let alone it being in the main street. It was a fascinating place to visit with a replica village of Hobart in the 1820's. Small comical figures are inserted throughout the landscape and make the visit much more interesting.



Even though it was Winter and less busy than in the warmer months, places like Richmond were still very busy, and on the Monday of a long weekend, we could not get a table to eat in the local bakery café. It was bursting at the seams! What must it be like in the peak tourist period....?

Another day's travel and we arrived at Oatlands. OK I lied; it was only about an hour's drive from Kempton, but I did want to stay here and see the town and its surrounds. Normally we will go a good bit further than this in a day's travel. Oatlands is famous for a windmill which previously ground wheat, and not all that long ago. The mill and its wheat and flour featured in a past episode of MasterChef. The town is one of Tasmania's oldest settlements and was named by Governor Macquarie after an English town in the county of Surrey in 1821. It was developed as a military base for the control and management of convicts because of its central location between Hobart and Launceston. Convicts were assigned to nearby farms and properties, and also worked on public buildings, roads and bridges. Many of those stone walls and bridges are still intact today. Oatlands has the largest collection of sandstone buildings in a village setting in Australia. The town's authentic colonial character is reflected in 87 original sandstone buildings along the town's main street. This is a delightful town by anyone's standards. And it has heaps of cafes!

The place we camped was behind the Callington Mill and overlooking Lake Doverton, and we spent two peaceful days and nights here, if somewhat cold due to the altitude here (406 m).

It was then onwards to the North and we arrived at Chudleigh, the small town we stayed at just after arriving here. The friendly little town is nestled in a valley with nearby mountains blocking any wind. Those same mountains now had snow on them and it was pretty nippy here. Sunny but nippy. One morning was minus five degrees and there was a heavy frost and with thick ice on the

car. I started to think darkly about the need to head much further North, like up to Queensland for preference. I managed to also get a photo of something unique; a frozen spiderweb.

Despite the cold weather I forced



myself to eat a couple of ice creams from the nearby honey and ice cream shop. It was hard work but someone had to do it.

The honey shop sells a bewildering array of honeys and icecreams, and you can sample the honey to make sure you buy the right flavours.



Even though this was our second stay here there are still places around there we did not get to visit. But one day we did head up into the mountains to see the snow. It was a lovely day's trip and we saw quite deep snow although I refused to get out to photograph it as it was cold. This was probably as cold as it got while we were here in Tasmania!



What we found was that although days were continuing to be sunny (generally) the sun was low in the sky and so we got significantly less power into the batteries. It wasn't a big issue but it meant a few times we needed to recharge with the generator, and we were glad we had it with us. As we have efficient lithium batteries (which came into their own here in Tassie) the batteries were charged very quickly. We did not ever get below 70% of full charge so this was not an issue. Getting the washing done and dried was always a problem of course but while in Tasmania we did go to a laundromat twice. This was the first time in about twenty years that we have visited a laundromat (and that was in France and Germany).

Our trip was rapidly coming to an end now and we were keen to stay somewhere relatively close to Devonport and ready for the last run to the ferry. The spot we chose was Sheffield, which is a small mountain town which overlooks Mount Roland (which had snow on the peaks). Sheffield has a RV camp with water and a dump point (mundane but essential features) and so we paid our fees for the four nights allowable to stay. The shot here was taken from elsewhere and when we were staying here that mountain had heaps of snow on the peaks.



From here we decided to go back over to Cradle Mountain on a day trip (as my friend Lea says, all roads in Tasmania lead to Cradle Mountain) and see if the weather was better this time. It was.

I think it took us about two hours of steady driving to get there, and the road was both scenic and very winding, but it was worth the effort. The day was crisp and sunny and beautiful for

photography. When first arriving at Cradle Mountain in the national park, you are first greeted with an ugly industrial-looking car park and a grey building which houses a café, tourist facility and the national park-staffed desk presence. At the desk you get a parks pass and the bus ticket which delivers you to the various drop off points for walks on the way to the main drawcard, Lake Dove. (If you are smart and get your parks pass before arriving in Tasmania all park entries and this bus are free).

Also if you are smart you will take your own packed lunch and bottle of water as the prices of the food here are seriously ouch country.



But the national park is scenic beyond belief. Even if you did not progress further than the bus parking area you would be rewarded with a most amazing scene of the mountains behind the lake. This area is famed for the beauty

of course, and for its wilderness walks. It delivers with a real impact.

I had bought a new cold weather jacket in Launceston and I was glad I had it, as the weather was freezing, even if it was sunny.



Our last week in Tasmania had arrived and we were down to our last few days, which we spent sightseeing around Sheffield, and grabbing a last few geocaches.

On the final day we headed to a parking area near the ferry terminal, nice and early in the afternoon (boarding was from 5pm onwards) and chatted to fellow ferry travelers while we waited. The chaos of boarding at the Melbourne end was non-existent at Devonport which had ample room for people to park up and wait. The van made it handy to make a cup of coffee and rest.

Eventually we headed onto the ferry and made our way to our cabin. A couple of drinks with some friends and dinner at the café, and we were then ready for an early night. And thus ended our first trip to Tasmania with the van.

