



The Three Capes Track in Tasmania was our first family multi-day hike with our kids who are ten and twelve years old. We camp and day hike regularly over summer, however, this was a totally new experience. Let me share our experience with you.

## Preparation

We did a little hiking (the longest day around 4 hours) in the weeks leading up to the Three Capes. Being a very active family, our main goal was to adapt to carrying biggish packs and getting the fit correct.

Packing was the main pre-challenge. I'm now convinced there is an art to backpack packing in which I have no talent! I was conscious of weight, but now even more so. I will be more ruthless next time and not take anything unless it's completely necessary.

My pack weighed almost 20kg, which I found extremely heavy considering I'm only about 57kg myself. Carrying food for 2 adults and 2 kids was interesting. Allowing enough food but not too much was not easy. The hike was a carry in, carry out arrangement so we couldn't dump anything.

We are a big eating family and starving my kids -who wanted to do the hike but can be reluctant hikers at times was not an option. Obviously.

## Day 1 - Port Arthur to Surveyors Cabin

Our hike commenced with an eco boat tour leaving Port Arthur and dropping us at Denmans Cove where we literally jumped off and headed up the beach to start hiking. Well, the hiking started after the first of what was a hundred or so snack breaks our kids demanded over the next four days.

However, we actually got to enjoy the beach all to ourselves and, as with each subsequent day, it was a nice reminder to slow down and relax a little.

Five minutes after leaving the beach we encountered the first of five tiger snakes on our trip. A short hour or so hike then took us to a clearing and to our impressive hut for the evening - Surveyors Cabin.

How beautiful to sit back and enjoy the sunset over the ocean from the expansive deck.



*Arriving at Surveyors Cabin on the first day.*

## Meals we ate on the track

Our cup of soup and dehydrated meal was edible. The microwave chocolate puddings that I tried to steam were not very popular. Oh dear, I bought them for every night - that is a lot of chocolate pudding to carry around. Note: No chocolate puddings next time.

Although our meals were fine and quite a few people did comment on the smell of the warmed long life naan bread we brought along to accompany our meals, one group, in particular, were the envy of the huts. Every night was a feast. Starting on day 1 with steak, wine, and cake for dessert.

The last evening was risotto with truffle oil. Needless to say, there were quite a few envious people (including me) looking on as they unloaded their gourmet supplies each evening.



However, they also did admit that it was perhaps why they also dragged into the huts last each afternoon as well. Gourmet is not light!

## Day 2 - Surveyors Cabin to Munro Cabin

After an early start, our sleeping rooms had no blinds so were roused at daybreak. Our second-day hiking (11km) was fantastic with sunny and calm conditions. The many snack breaks along our route again allowed us to fully enjoy our surroundings. The views of Jurassic Crack were particularly spectacular.



*Hiking the Three Capes was a superb family bonding exercise. Can't wait until we do NZ now.*

## The varied terrain

The terrain varied, from coastal views to heaths of wild flowers. Our favourite stop of the day was Ellarwey, short for 'Where the Hell Are We' – an enormous seat in the middle of a heath overlooking the ocean.

One of the novelties of the hike were interesting seats, works of art really, scattered along the trail and a story in the guidebook at each one. Never a chance to get bored, we then descended into a cloud forest followed by a rainforest.

Arriving at our second hut – Munro Cabin was awe inspiring. A beautiful building with a viewing platform jutting out over a cliff – just magnificent. That was, magnificent while the sun was out and we were lazing around in shorts.

However, the perfect weather soon came to an end as it can so quickly in Tasmania. A couple of hours after arriving, the wind blew up, the temperature dropped, and clouds rolled in.

## Day 3 - Munro Cabin to Retakunna Cabin (Side Trip to The Blade)

On our third day, we awoke to more furious winds and very low cloud cover – not ideal for the 14km return hike to The Blade for the postcard view of the trip. However, that is Tasmania – wild and rugged, but always beautiful.

We did, however, get to hike with only a day pack for a bit, the kids and I were ecstatic!

Setting off into the mist we couldn't see beyond a few metres. We arrived at the famous The Blade, took a photo of the warning sign and made our way to the treacherous area.

To be honest, perhaps we may not have taken the kids out there if we had been able to see what was in store. Tasman Island could not be seen but we could see the enormous drops to the ocean below by crawling and lying down. Not exactly what we had hoped for but that's nature.



*Just a taste of some of the views you'll enjoy on Three Capes.*

By the time we had hiked back away, the cloud cover lifted a little. We then spent time on the rocks overlooking The Blade, Tasman Island, and the surrounding coast. It was quite surreal to sit on the edge of these glorious cliffs in the mist.

After lunch back at the hut, we loaded on our turtle shells for a short hike to our last hut

Retakunna Cabin, and the view of Mt Fortescue. We were quite reluctant to leave and wished there were, in fact, three capes ready to visit to give us another night or two on the trail. At the moment the Three Capes Track only consists of two capes – hopefully, the funding is approved soon for the final part.



*The waters below Mt Fortescue.*

## Day 4 - Retakunna Cabin to Port Arthur

After a short walk, we started our ascent of Mt Fortescue. It was quite a hard walk up for the kids, especially our skinny ten-year-old, who were understandably tired after four days on the trail, carrying their own packs.

We eventually made it to the summit where the kids had to stop to do a ‘cheers’ with their BBQ Shapes – another popular special treat for the hike.

We then skirted around and down the mountain. The kids said they had seen enough cliffs and rock faces but as they lied down and peered over the sides to see the huge drops below, they were still fascinated.

As with each day, our final day had varied terrain. Long stretches of coast and then tramping through a beautiful rainforest surrounded by enormous tree ferns. Magical. It never ceased to amaze me how quickly the environment altered.



*The common rooms in the cabins were a fantastic place to eat and meet fellow hikers.*

## Return hike to Cape Huey

For the two-hour return hike out to Cape Huey, we left our packs at a junction. Another welcome dump! Just looking ahead as the trail led out to the peak was wonderful. We had views both sides, and the cliff faces were mesmerising.

Once again, the weather showed us drama. We watched as a rain storm quickly approached us over the mountains, within 10 minutes it had gone from warm and sunny to raining and freezing. But, as quickly as it changed, it changed again and we were once more stripping off and hot.

## The final hours

As we put our turtle shells back on and set off for our last hour of walking, we chatted about our favourite huts and parts of the trip. We stopped for a moment to see another snake slither off into the bushes and then arrived at the Three Capes sign for our final trail photos. A short walk and we were on the beach at Fortescue Bay. Hiking boots were flung off, pants unzipped, and we paddled in the icy cold sea. Deciding it was just a little too cold, even for us, to have a proper swim.

All of a sudden our bus arrived and it's time to get on board for the thirty-minute ride back to our hire car at Port Arthur.



*Look at that mist!*



## Our experience hiking the track

What an amazing experience. Our kids coped so well – we, and they are very proud! They hiked 46km over mostly three days and carried packs weighing approximately 8kg the same body weight per kg as my husband carried on his back. I carried the most of course.

Apart from a few lollies (well, quite a few!) needed to lure them up some hills, they were enthusiastic the entire trip.

Learning about the environment, seeing the wildlife, and living with 44 other people in the huts each afternoon and evening was educational and fun.

We are now all excited out about next multi-day hike in New Zealand, and looking forward to lots more adventures.

## The facilities

As this track was only opened less than twelve months ago, the huts and facilities were fantastic. Each hut consisted of common rooms with gas cooking facilities and seating areas. There was lots of glass so we could admire the views even when it was chilly, snug as a bug inside, and gorgeous window seats that we managed to claim each afternoon and settle ourselves into until bedtime. There were also large decks at each cabin, either looking out to the ocean or the bush.

The common rooms contained USB chargers – very helpful for phones and cameras. Our phones didn't have service during the hike (Telstra users had some service) but I consider that a good thing.

At each hut, there were common rooms, sleeping rooms, and toilet blocks set a little away. Most of the sleeping huts were eight-person rooms but as the only family in our group, we seemed to be lucky enough to be allocated a four-person room at each destination by the onsite rangers.



*It wasn't all hard work. The distances between huts mean there is plenty of time to bask in the sunshine at the end of the day.*

## Lighting and heating in the common rooms

The common rooms had lighting and heating if necessary (only needed on our last morning) and the sleeping huts had no lighting, just windows without blinds, so you are awake at daybreak. It was therefore early to bed and early rising for most people.

The toilets also don't have lighting. Great idea to remember to put fresh batteries in headlamps prior to the trip. A note to myself for next trip!

## Comfort of the bunks

I was expecting the bunks and plastic covered mattresses to be uncomfortable but was pleasantly surprised as they were thick and comfy and not 'plastic'. I slept well every night. Though, not sure if that was just because of physical exhaustion. Some people did find snorers an issue in shared rooms as the walls are quite thin, but we were lucky enough not to



have any problems.

My husband did have a little trouble sleeping, however that may have been more to do with the standard size sleeping bag I purchased for my tall husband.

## The toilet facilities

The drop toilets were also much better than I imagined – not really smelly at all. I assume this has something to do with their generous size and the chemicals used. The waste is removed by helicopter. The actual process is surprisingly quite fascinating.

## Helicopters on the track

Helipads are at or near each hut and that was how the hut materials were brought in too. But a note on this – we did not even see a helicopter during our hike. Apparently in New Zealand on the Milford Track you can hear and see helicopters constantly.

Private operators have been approved to build huts for guided hikes on the Three Capes Track, so as the new huts are built and more people populate the track, helicopters may become more of an issue. For now – it's not an issue at all.

## Rangers stationed at the huts

A ranger was stationed at each hut to greet us and direct us to our room each afternoon. The rangers were fabulous sources of knowledge about the area and the track.

Each evening we had a group 'meeting' at 6pm, detailing the forecast weather and track conditions. We learnt so much from the rangers about the creation of the track.

I found the statistics about the hikers very interesting. The biggest age group is actually over 50s and quite a few families also do the hike.

On our hike, the group of 48, was quite varied, there were people of all ages from 20s to one man hiking individually who was over 70, and of course our family group.

## Tips For Hiking Three Capes

- Freeze-dried, pre-packaged meals are a light and quick and easy prepare meal option.
- Label ziplock bags with meals and snack packs to make preparing for each day easier.
- Zip-off hiking pants – I know, never thought I'd wear them – are great for dressing to the every changing conditions.
- Carry a good sleeping bag. We opted for lightweight Black Wolf synthetic bags.
- On this trip we took our old stainless steel plates and bowls. They ended up being quite heavy. I'm looking at the Sea to Summit collapsible options for the next trip to save space and cut down on weight.
- I really liked my travel pillow – it hung off my pack as we hiked, and made sleeping just a little more comfy.



***Have you hiked the Three Capes yet? What's your favourite bit?***

