



December usually brings about pretty hot summer temperatures in South Australia. Most people work under an air conditioner, then holiday by the beach with the cricket on. Fair play to them.

If you're a bushwalker though, this will not do! Colder climates must be sought. Tasmania offers this, plus the added bonus of being a mecca for 'out-there-ness'. With the scene set, my Dad and I just needed to get there and do *something*. So we settled on a bushwalking trip to Frenchmans Cap.

...No, we're not flying to Tasmania to visit some obscure fashion shop that sells hats. Frenchmans Cap is actually a 1446-metre high peak, just on the Western side of central Tasmania, near the Franklin River. With a similar name to the US of A's 'El Cap', Frenchmans Cap looks a lot like its younger cousin – or, as the guests of the nearby Macquarie Harbour Penal Station thought (who could see the thing from their cells), a liberty cap worn during the French Revolution, hence the name. I guess if you're in a penal settlement, you'll drag inspiration for liberty from anywhere... even a lump of rock.



Dad and I settled on a bushwalking trip to Frenchmans Cap.

Day 1

Flying somewhere to go bushwalking usually requires a bit of faff to get things sorted. Hire a car, pick up gas for the stove, sort the last bit of food... all that sort of stuff. Get that out of the way in half a day or so, and *bam* you're off and running!

...Not really. Remember, you're a bushwalker.

There we were on Day One, walking in off the Lyell Highway with a straightforward 15 kilometres or so to get to the first hut. This section of the track used to be called the Sodden Loddons, as it crosses the buttongrass-infested Loddon Plains. However, everyone's favourite Australian entrepreneur and electronics store pioneer Dick Smith splashed some cash a few years ago, after he saw the plight of the track. Now, it's like a highway! I'd had the privilege of venturing to Frenchmans before, for a rock-climbing-specific trip – but Dad hadn't, so he was most pleased with this pleasant walking surface.

To balance out the pleasantries though, Day One was quite hot and humid; this left Dad feeling the strain. Upon reaching the first hut at Lake Vera, there was a sense of relief that Day One was done – it was time to rehydrate and recharge.



Day 1 was hot and humid!



Time for a rest...



What a view!



Our first night at Lake Vera

Day 2

Day Two of the walk went pretty much straight up Barron Pass for most of the day. Again, my 60-plus year-old father was in Struggle Town a bit here, and probably wanted his own 'liberty'



from this suffering!

Liberty came in view from Barron Pass – from here, Frenchmans is clearly visible and, if you’ve only ever seen SA mountain ranges, looks like nothing you’ve ever seen. That said, if you’ve been to El Cap, it might be a little underwhelming!

The reality sets in here as well. From your viewpoint on Barron Pass, there’s endless wilderness and ‘out-there-ness’ around you. No sign of civilisation anywhere. Journeying on from here involves a mix of sidling a mountain and busting through a neat track that cuts through the undergrowth of Pandani plants, before reaching Hut Nirvana.



Lake Tahune is approximately 1,200m high.

That’s right, the second hut and campsite for Day Two is at Lake Tahune – almost five-star accommodation.

I’m not joking.

The new Lake Tahune hut (kudos to Dick Smith again, and the Tassie Government), is an architectural masterpiece when it comes to wilderness huts. A hydro-generator powers USB ports, lights, emergency gear for the Rangers quarters, and a very quiet air conditioner. Besides the pass fee (that anyone entering a park is required to pay), it’s amazing that this hut exists and can essentially be used for free. My Dad and I dropped our packs here, had some food, and then set our sights on trying to reach the top of the Cap.



We had the Lake Tahune hut all to ourselves!



Frenchmans Cap from Lake Tahune

It was here where our luck ran out, as it always does somewhere on a bushwalking trip. The weather blew in, and clouds and misty rain obscured the top. Dad and I made the decision to call it quits here, as opposed to risking a wet, tricky summit attempt for no summit views. We were both a little upset to have not reached the top, but understood that it’s not really the top that matters. For me, the whole experience of organising a trip with your Dad (or for him, his son), flying interstate, walking for a few days, and watching your Dad work hard (or for him, watching his son in his element) is a memorable enough experience without a successful summit attempt to *Cap* it off.



The turnaround point of our summit attempt!



Taking in the scenes before our descent.

Day 3

It’s all well and good to console yourself with those sentimental thoughts as you relax in the Chateau Tahune – but you still need to get up the next day and walk back to the car. The weather that blew in the day prior was forecast to develop further and provide heavy rain – so we were hot-footing it down Barron Pass as quickly as we could to escape it. We were either too slow, or the weather came in earlier... because before we reached Lake Vera Hut, we were soaked through!

Would we stop here and attempt to dry out, watching the rain all afternoon – or push on and get back to the car in one big day?



With the lure of a nice pub meal instead of another tuna pasta dish from his son, my Dad voted strongly for pushing on! I was pleased enough – he was after the full adventure experience of walking through 15-20 millimetres of rain! So, on we went, ignoring Dragon's advice to not '*go out into the pouring rain*'.



Dad voted to push through for the pub meal at the end!



The rain kit is on – we're ready for it!

At the end of that long third day of walking, we got back to our hire car and dried out. It's always funny to consider any journey where you end up back where you started. What was the point of it? To go and see a big lump of rock? To push ourselves? Does it even matter? No-one really knows what the point of life is, but here we are still living and having a good time. To me, that's what bushwalking or any journey should really ever be: something to do that, sure, may have some nice points of interest along the way and push you out of your comfort zone, but for the most part is something fun to do that has you spending time with others (or just yourself, if that's all the company you need). Complicate it any more than that, and good luck to you! That's my two cents anyway, and something I realised after one of the best bushwalks I've ever done to Frenchmans Cap – with my Dad.

Important Info:

Length (km): 54 (return)

No. of Days Recommended (Walking): 3-5

Frenchmans Cap is considered an alpine area, and as such can experience nasty weather. It is not recommended as your first overnight walk. Read the following information on the [Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service website](#) to ascertain whether it's in your wheelhouse.

Other Considerations:

- A valid Park Pass is required to walk in the Frenchmans Cap National Park
- There are a multitude of private transport providers in Tasmania that service interstate bushwalkers, if you're opposed to leaving a hire car by the side of the road. There have been some reports of vandalism to cars in the carpark, so take care.
- Frenchmans Cap also offers some good rock climbing opportunities, and is in close proximity to the Franklin River – so if you're a real outdoor enthusiast with skills in those areas, a multi-activity trip in the area is highly recommended!



No-one really knows what the point of life is – but here we are, still living and having a good time!



Where will *your* next father-son trip be?

