



# My Favourite Place



Arriving by light plane at Melaleuca's small gravel airstrip, I entered a world of silence, broken only by the occasional "chirruk" of yellow-throated honeyeaters. Still reeling from the bustle of Hobart's city life, just an hour's flight away, I found the quiet of Tasmania's Southwest National Park awesome.

Huddled among the stunted tea-trees near the strip, were observations hides for the endangered orange-bellied parrots that breed and feed here, and two basic walkers huts. From here, hardy bushwalkers laden with heavy packs set out along the South Coast Track for a seven-day long trek east to Cockle Creek in notoriously unpredictable weather. For them, the effort is repaid a hundred times over, with splendid views of pristine beaches and rugged deserted coastline pounded by the Southern Ocean.

The rest of us don't have to miss out on the park's spectacular scenery. My husband and I spent six days exploring Bathurst Harbour on a double-decked cruiser, taking sizeable excursions wherever possible.

The area has about 240 wet days each year and it was very pleasant to return from an outing to a hot shower, dry clothes and a gourmet dinner on board. On one-day trip, we took a rubber duckie trip up the Derwent River to Settlement Point – the site of any early 19<sup>th</sup> century Huon pine logging settlement, now reduced to just a few foundation stones.

In the upper reaches of the river, we turned off the boat's motor and glided silently beneath great quartzite cliffs.

The highlight, though, was the climb up 771 metre Mt. Ruby. We soaked up magnificent views over the harbour towards the Southern Ocean as our party of six followed the steep, muddy track through low scrub. At the saddle, about 2/3 of the way up, we took a breather before tackling the rocky climb to the summit. Looking north-east towards the Western Arthur Range, over jagged ridges and valleys sheltering Antarctic Beech rainforests, there was neither sight nor sound of human presence.

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