

# Mt Anne Circuit

Bron Willis outlines a spectacular walking circuit in Tasmania's South-west



**THE LEAVES OF THE PANDANUS PLANT CURL INTO DELIGHTFUL SPIRALS,** cushion plants exude a lush green hue and the tiny, colourful alpine flowers at your feet remind you of an atlas. Lake Judd stretches out in the depths of a valley nearby. Behind you, Lake Pedder's sky blue water glistens, a gentle reminder of a battle that was lost and a war that still wages not too far away.

This is the Southwest National Park, and ahead of you stand the cliffs of Mt Anne. It is the highest peak in the park and offers a considerable challenge. The three- to four-day Mt Anne circuit provides walkers with a wonderful overview of the area from a range of angles; by the time the circuit is complete, walkers have seen the many faces of Mt Anne, Lake Judd, Lots Wife and Lake Pedder as well as countless unnamed tarns whose beauty adds a mystical quality to the surrounding valleys.

## When to go

A clear view from Mt Anne is—unsurprisingly—most likely in summer, although even then there may be storms and even snow. Experienced walkers do complete the circuit in autumn and spring, but few venture this way during the often snowy months of winter. Walkers should be prepared for severe weather at any time of the year and should be ready to change plans if the weather turns.

## Safety/warnings

This circuit is a challenging one and requires a reasonable level of fitness. Although the track is mostly easy to follow, there are two parts of the route that can be tricky to navigate: the side trip to the summit of Mt Anne, and the traverse of 'the Notch' en route to Mt Lot. These

sections require much scrambling and some basic rockclimbing. The fact that Mt Anne is a side trip makes summiting easier, but negotiating the Notch with a full pack on your back can be dicey. Although some track notes merely suggest that a climbing rope may be useful to haul your pack in places, negotiating the Notch without one could be dangerous in bad weather.

You'll also need a sturdy tent and three- to four-season sleeping bag, especially if you plan to camp at Shelf Camp, which is exposed to strong winds.

## Maps

Tasmap publishes the 1:25 000 topographical maps *Anne* and *Scotts*. Some walkers may decide to forgo the latter, as *Anne* covers all but the last seven kilometres or so of the walk, and the track in this section is easily followed.

## Further reading

The Mt Anne circuit is covered in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* and John Chapman's *South West Tasmania*.

## Permits

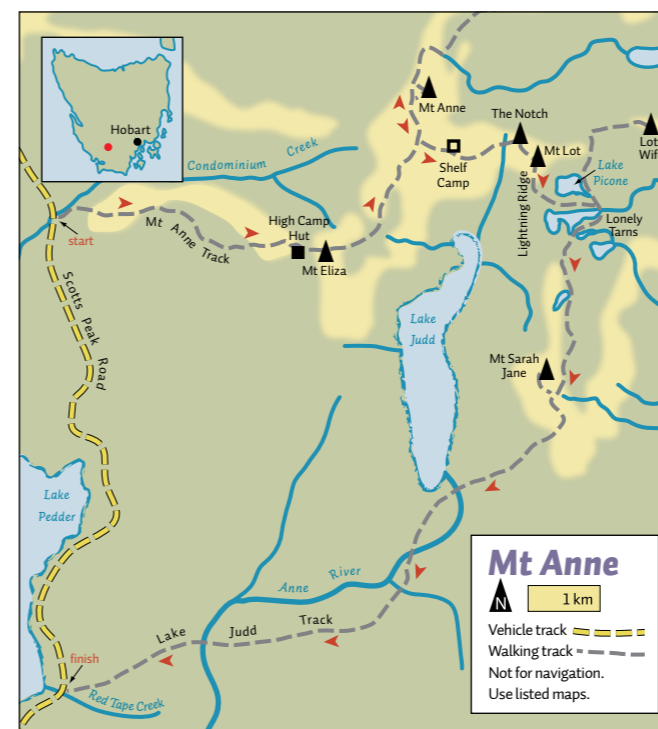
Walkers are required to carry a permit to walk in the Southwest National Park. Holiday passes last eight weeks and cost \$30 for one person without a car, or \$50 for a vehicle, including all its passengers. You can buy these at the Parks & Wildlife Service office just outside Maydena (phone [03] 6288 1149). If you know you'll be passing through out of hours, the staff there may be willing to help organise your permit over the phone.



## Access

This walk is difficult to access using public transport. Tassielink (phone 1300 300 520) runs a mini-bus service from late November to late March from Hobart to Scotts Peak Road, dropping walkers off at the start of the walk for \$69 each way. The service only runs on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

A better option is to drive and leave your car at Condominium Creek on Scotts Peak Road. The walk finishes at Red Tape Creek, roughly nine kilometres further down Scotts Peak Road. This is a long, tedious way to end an otherwise exhilarating walk; if you can organise a car shuttle, do so. This is a quiet road outside holi-



## The walk at a glance

Grade	Moderate to difficult
Length	Three to four days
Type	Mountain scenery, spectacular views of lakes and tarns
Region	Tasmania's Southwest National Park
Nearest towns	Maydena
Start, finish	Condominium Creek, Red Tape Creek (both on Scotts Peak Road)
Maps	Anne and Scotts Tasmap 1:25 000 topographic maps
Best time	Summer
Special points	Take a rope for hauling packs and be prepared for some basic rockclimbing at the summit of Mt Anne and while traversing the Notch

**From far left to right, the south side of Mt Anne as seen from the Eliza Plateau.** Grant Dixon. **The author at Shelf Camp with Mt Anne watching over in the background.** All uncredited photos Terry Willis. **A mist bow over Judds Charm (officially known by the more prosaic name of Spanner Lake) in the Lonely Tarns region.** Dixon. **A detail of the endemic pandani.**





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day periods, so you may not always be able to thumb a lift.

### The walk

Head out east from Condominium Creek, along the boardwalk and through the button grass. Begin the ascent through low scrub, remembering occasionally to turn around and enjoy the views of Lake Pedder, which get more spectacular as you ascend. Continue past the first saddle and along the open ridge towards High Camp Hut. On a warm day you'll quickly find yourself sweating, as you gain 700 metres over the first three kilometres.

Just after the beginning of the tree line you'll come across the short side track to High Camp Hut. Take this and find a small but welcoming hut, water tank and toilet. If you took the minibus you'll probably want to stop here for the night unless you arrived early, in good weather and with plenty of daylight hours.

If you made an early start and you're aiming for Shelf Camp, push on up to Mt Eliza, where you'll enjoy your first view of Mt Anne's reddish-brown dolerite cliffs. The best lunch spot is further on, past the open plateau, where the intriguing vegetation will bring out the botanist in you. Lake Judd and other mountain tarns come into view and you'll no doubt be drawn to drop your pack and deviate for a better view. Views such as these are one reason people fall in love with walking.

Continue along the track, which veers north towards the end of the plateau. Soon you'll come to a boulderfield, where the walking becomes tricky and tiring. Carry on to the west of the peak until you meet the track junction. This is the time to make a decision about whether to summit Mt Anne. If the sky is clear and you still have two hours of light, drop your packs here and take the side trip to Mt Anne. The peak is a magnet for bad weather and the route to the summit is tricky at the best of times. If you've had enough for the day or you want to wait for better weather the next day, take the turn-off to the east towards Shelf Camp, at least another half an hour's walk away.

### Side trip to Mt Anne summit

From the track junction, head north, following cairns along the ridge to the saddle below Mt Anne. Climb up the rocky gully, carefully following the cairns. As you near the bottom of a steep rock face, the route traverses terraces to the left and then goes directly up for about two or three metres. It is easy to take the wrong route here, but if you look carefully for the cairns, you'll eventually find the way. After the short climb, traverse rightwards across more ledges, edging your way over steep boulders and up and over the ridge, ascending to the summit. Enjoy views west to Lake Pedder and south-east to the magical Lonely Tarns and Lots Wife, which—from this angle—looks like a thin, circular column of rock jutting up from the landscape. Once you've had your fill, return to the packs, taking care on the tricky descent.

### Mt Anne turn-off to Shelf Camp

Collect your packs and take the turn-off to the east of the plateau. The track descends from the ridge and goes along the terraces facing Mt Anne. Traverse these for a good half an hour until you get to the large rocky slabs of Shelf Camp. This

camp, adjacent to the dolerite columns of Mt Anne's south-east face, is extremely exposed, and thus particularly spectacular. Mt Anne, drenched in a sunset's golden hues, provides a perfect distraction for the designated dinner chef; however, this camp is not recommended in poor weather. You may get lucky with a still evening, but if the gusts of wind common to this area come in during the night, your sleep will not be restful! The noise of the wind hurtling through the valley towards you is enough to make the most unshakeable outdoors enthusiast a little edgy. Pitch your tent diligently, otherwise you could have a very restless night.

### Day two

Pick up the cairns and follow the route east along the terraces. Negotiating the large boulders is tiring as you navigate the rocky ridge towards Mt Lot. As you round the crest of the ridge, Lake Judd comes into view once more, as does the impossible-looking Lightning Ridge. Follow the cairns until they take you up and over to the northern side of an unnamed peak just before Mt Lot. You'll begin to descend and will soon approach the Notch, the most challenging section of the circuit. This can be extremely nerve-racking; the Notch is obviously the place for all weather to come pummeling through from one side of the mountain to the other, producing a high-pitched whistling sound. As you approach on the northern side, you'll need your rope to lower your packs from a ledge to the ground below. Carefully edge your way over the ledge yourself and collect your pack.

You are now standing in the V of the Notch and must hoist yourself up the rock in front of you, leaving your pack behind, but taking the rope with you. This basic rockclimbing can be off-putting. Use footholds on the right and the corner on the left to hoist yourself up and move your weight over the ledge. Once you have mounted the ledge, there's a makeshift anchor that someone has fashioned out of rope and sling. If you trust this enough you can use it to anchor yourself while you throw down the rope and your companion ties on the packs, ready for you to haul up. Once you're over the ledge you can relax a little in the knowledge that, although your day is far from over, the worst is behind you.

Continue following the cairns, traversing the south-west knoll towards Mt Lot. Once you round the summit, views of Lake Picone and the Lonely Tarns, often haunted by hanging mist, are revealed. The route swings south after Mt Lot as you descend Lightning Ridge. Picking your way around the boulders is strenuous work; the descent is steep and hard on the knees.

Once you leave Lightning Ridge, enter the damp and mossy forest below. After fighting the twisting tree limbs encroaching your path, descend steadily towards the open scrub on the banks of Lake Picone. The track leads you along a slight rise between Lake Picone and the Lonely Tarns. Lots Wife, to your east, is no longer a thin column of rock as you view its south face. There are many good campsites, but the most pleasant is worth the extra ten minutes' walk down the bank at the farthest end, where a creek runs between Lake Picone and the Lonely Tarns. In summer, Lake Picone is a magical and literally breathtaking place to swim: the water is crystal clear, but icy. A plaque on a small boulder nearby remembers

Joe Picone; if he kept watch over this lovely but lonely campsite the night we were there, he did so silently and contentedly.

### Day three

Head back uphill to the junction where the track heads south, then swings west in between the larger two of the Lonely Tarns. You soon leave the lakes behind and enter low scrub, beginning to climb. As you round a knoll and pick up cairns once more, look behind you and admire yesterday's route down Lightning Ridge. Pass another small tarn on your right and walk through open, flat marshland towards the gentle slopes of Mt Sarah Jane.

Continue to the south, up and across a ridge, where the track swings south-west down the steady slope of Mt Sarah Jane, through forest and towards the southern end of Lake Judd. The track opens out into boggy button-grass plains, crossing streams and creeks and, finally, Anne River flowing from Lake Judd. You will soon meet the noticeably better maintained Lake Judd Track. This leaves the river, crossing many



The author atop Mt Eliza with Lake Pedder in the background.

tributaries, before finally crossing it again by a bridge.

If you're walking out to a waiting car, walk the last two kilometres to Red Tape Creek. If you're catching the bus, or have planned for another night out, this is the place to stop. The campsite is a disappointment after the stunning locations of the previous nights, but after a long day you may be glad of a flat, sheltered spot to crawl into your sleeping bag. Be warned, the mosquitoes here are so many and monstrous that you may be tempted to eat your dinner sitting astride the cable bridge over the river; it's the only place they won't follow, so long as there is a light breeze.

### Day four

Cross the cable bridge and walk the remaining two kilometres out to Red Tape Creek and Scotts Peak Road. Turn right and walk the tedious nine kilometres back to your car or, if you still believe in hitchhiking and the charity of friendly Tasmanian folk, do it the easy way; stick your thumb out and try not to stink out the car. 🚗

Bron Willis is a Melbourne writer and editor who loves combining her two passions: words and the outdoors. She recommends the occasional splash in an icy cold Tasmanian tarn to clear the cobwebs out.