



Kenneth Lagoon. Photo: Andy Townsend

### STAYING SAFE

- Weather conditions are changeable. You must check local forecasts, including for high winds, flooding, snow and inclement weather. It is your responsibility to take adequate precautions and this may mean changing your plans to avoid dangerous conditions
- Using this area exposes you to hazards that occur in the natural environment, including uneven and slippery surfaces, steep slopes, cliff faces, creeks and rivers, snakes, ants and other insects. It is your responsibility to be prepared and to manage the risks that you find while on the reserve
- Children should be supervised at all times
- Walk within your capabilities - choose a suitable route and stay on formed tracks and trails
- Let someone know your plans and notify them upon your return
- Gravel roads can be rough – do not travel above 40 km/hr
- Punctures are common, so know how to change a tyre
- A vehicle with high clearance is recommended, though it does not need to be a four-wheel drive
- The route in to Skullbone Plains is not frequently travelled. While TLC staff attempt to ensure the road is clear, it is possible that fallen trees may block vehicular access, especially after high rainfall and winds. Please notify our office if roads are impassable
- Driving out at night should be avoided due to wildlife on the roads

### TREADING LIGHTLY

- Skullbone Plains is included in the National Reserve System and is protected by a conservation covenant under the *Nature Conservation Act 2002*
- Leave what you find – all wildlife, natural materials and historic artefacts are protected
- Please take all rubbish with you
- Do not feed wildlife as it encourages problematic behaviour and is bad for the animal's health
- Firearms, dogs, cats and other pets are not permitted
- Fires are only permitted in the fire pit at the Skullbone Plains campsite when there are no fire restrictions in place
- Access may be closed from time-to-time due to wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax fleayi*) breeding
- There are no open four-wheel drive tracks in the reserve. The Old Lake Ina Trail is being rehabilitated and is not accessible to vehicles

If you notice anything out of the ordinary while visiting Skullbone Plains, please contact the TLC on 6225 1399.

The TLC acknowledges the traditional owners of this land. We pay respect to elders past and present and acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

The TLC thanks supporters for their generous donations that made the purchase and protection of the Skullbone Plains possible, specifically Rob and Sandy Purves, Graham Wood, the Australian Government's National Reserve System Program, and many other individuals and companies. Our thanks also to everyone who supported the 'Loo With A View' campaign.

The Five Rivers Reserve encompassing 11,113 ha, extends across five catchments including the Nive River, Serpentine Rivulet, Pine River, Little Pine River and Little River.

We hope you enjoy your visit to Skullbone Plains.

This guide was supported through funding from the Australian Government



TASLAND.ORG.AU

@tas\_land @taslandconservancy @tasland taslandconservancy



TASMANIAN LAND CONSERVANCY

# EXPLORE SKULLBONE PLAINS

Skullbone Plains Reserve and adjoining Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Photo: Matthew Newton

Scribbly knobs of tormented forest frame long runways of sub-alpine moor and fen sloping gently upwards from northeast to southwest and potted with shallow, unpretentious tarns buffered by snakey bog.

Pete Hay, from *The Skullbone Experiment – A Paradigm of Art and Nature*

Encompassing 1,600 ha, the Skullbone Plains in Tasmania's Central Highlands features a remarkably diverse mosaic of open valleys, old-growth forests, native grasslands, cushion plants and sphagnum peatlands. Part of The Five Rivers Reserve, Skullbone Plains was purchased by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC) in 2010 and added to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area in 2013 due to its outstanding universal values.

Less than 10 km from Lake St Clair in the Cradle Mountain - Lake St Clair National Park, Skullbone Plains shares a 16 km boundary with the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, and adjoins reserves on three sides. The property is significant for nature conservation being the largest privately owned area in Tasmania of nationally endangered sphagnum peatlands. Skullbone Plains also provides important habitat for endangered species, including the Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisi*), the Spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) and the Clarence galaxias (*Galaxias johnstoni*).

Fire, water and frost largely influence vegetation on the reserve. Where frost inhibits the survival of most trees, other vegetation communities such as grasslands, moorlands, and heathlands thrive. Where drainage is poor, aquatic systems arc and curve through herb fields, filling ponds and tarns. The frequency and intensity of past fires also influences the vegetation present today.

### VISITING THE RESERVE

Skullbone Plains is in a remote area of Tasmania that is prone to extreme and wild weather. You need to be well equipped and ready for all conditions. Heavy snowfalls are not uncommon in the Central Highlands and conditions may change quickly. Check the local forecast before you leave and be prepared for four seasons.

You must be self-sufficient, bringing all food provisions. The nearest service stations to Skullbone Plains are at Ouse, Wayatinah, Derwent Bridge and Bronte Park but limited trading hours may apply. Expect to be out of mobile phone network range during your visit.

There are very limited facilities onsite with only a small camping area a short distance from the main carpark. Approximately 12 x 3 person tents can fit on the raised platforms. A nearby grassy area is available for extra campers during dry conditions only. Vehicles are not permitted beyond the carpark.

Please use the 'Loo with a View', and if you haven't eaten it, do not put it down the toilet. Please close the lid after use. A small water tank is positioned behind the camping area for campers to use for drinking and cooking purposes.

The fire pit at the camping area can be used when there are no fire restrictions in place. Please do not light fires in any other location on the reserve. A limited amount of wood is provided. Do not collect wood from within the reserve and do not bring your own as it may contain pests or diseases. Ensure the fire pit is fully extinguished when unattended.

To visit Skullbone Plains and to book the tent platforms, please contact the TLC office on (03) 6225 1399. You will also be provided with a key that opens various gates to access the reserve.





Flowering Scoparia (*Richea scoparia*). Photo: Matthew Newton

## GETTING THERE

The main approach to Skullbone Plains is via Bronte Park which is approximately 13.6 km northeast of Derwent Bridge, 188 km north of Hobart or 188 km south of Launceston. See the map provided for the approach to the reserve.

From the Bronte Park Shop travel 1.5 km north along the Marlborough Highway and veer left onto Pine Tier Road. In approximately 3 km keep right at the boat ramp sign to Pine Tier Lagoon, travelling over the Pine Tier Gate and Grid. Continue another 5 km along Pine Tier Rd. Keep left and travel straight ahead through another gate and grid. In just over half a kilometre you will go through the Nive River boomgate (CH12-2) and on to Viormy Rd. At the next bend, in approximately 300 m, keep right. After a further 3.5 km, veer right at another bend. In 4 km you will come across the next boomgate (CH12-4). In approximately 1 km you will see the start of the Skullbone Plains Walking Track on the left, and parking on the right. To access the main entrance to the reserve, continue 1.5 km to a boomgate (CH2-1) then after a further 1.4 km, you will come to another boomgate (CH2-3). In just over 1 km you will reach a 'T' intersection. Take a sharp left. In around 3 km you will reach a landing. Turn left, through the last boomgate (CH2-4) and continue a short distance where the road swings to the right to a parking area.

From Bronte Park it is approximately 32 km to the main Skullbone Plains carpark. Expect the drive to take no less than one hour. Look for these marker symbols ▲ at intersections along the way.

## THINGS TO SEE AND DO

### Sphagnum peatland

Endangered nationally, alpine sphagnum peatland is in decline throughout its range. Occurring in pockets across Skullbone Plains, sphagnum peatland occurs where fire has been either absent, or present but with low frequency and intensity. With neighbouring areas spanning Clarence Lagoon to Lake Ina, Skullbone Plains comprises one of the most significant expanses of sphagnum beds in Tasmania, including unique 'standing wave' structures unknown elsewhere in the world. As rising temperatures and climate change put pressure on water availability, the importance of sphagnum peatland to regulate water movement and downstream flow also surges.

### Miena cider gums

Regarded as the most cold tolerant of all eucalypts, the endemic and nationally endangered Miena cider gum (*Eucalyptus gunnii* subsp. *divaricate*) clusters in the frost hollows of Skullbone Plains. Restricted to Tasmania's Central Plateau, it is believed that during late spring and early summer, Tasmanian Aborigines collected the sugary sap from Miena cider gums in holes lined with clay and covered with bark. Allowing the substance to stand a while resulted in a fermented, cider-like brew of modest alcohol content.

The Miena cider gum has been in decline over the past 20 years due to an amalgam of pressures including drought, stock grazing and browsing from native species.

### Clarence galaxias

Nationally endangered, the Clarence galaxias is only found in six isolated locations in central Tasmania, including Skullbone Plains. Belonging to the Galaxiidae family, the group also occur in New Zealand and South America, and are likely to have emanated from a common Gondwanan ancestor. The small freshwater fish grows to about 13 cm in length and has irregular dark brown patches along its back and sides. After spawning in spring, Clarence galaxias eggs take around two months to hatch. The young feed on small insects while the diet of older fish is mainly comprised of bottom-dwelling insects. Clarence galaxias live for around four to five years and only survive in waterways free of the introduced and insatiable brown trout.



Peatlands at Skullbone Plains. Photo: Rob Blakers

## Monitoring

Skullbone Plains is part of the TLC's ecological monitoring program. Over many years, this has involved the keen surveillance of a range of sites. Using simple but reliable methods, the TLC's conservation ecologists and volunteers collect and assess information on flora and fauna. Images captured with infra-red motion sensor cameras and high resolution static image cameras reveal the presence and absence of various endangered species. The Carnivore Monitoring Program across the Five Rivers Reserve (including Skullbone Plains) is tracking population trends of Tasmanian devils, eastern and spotted-tailed quolls and feral cats, building a picture of the close ecological association between these four mammalian predators. Ecological monitoring is a critical ongoing program across the TLC's permanent reserves to ensure our land management practices continue to provide important species with the highest level of protection. See [tasland.org.au/science](http://tasland.org.au/science) for more information.

## GEOCONSERVATION VALUES

The presence of three moraines at Skullbone Plains forms part of the Central Highlands Cainozoic Glacial Area, which is listed as a nationally significant geo-conservation feature in the Tasmanian Geo-conservation Database. These moraines were deposited during the last glaciation which peaked between 18,000 and 22,000 years ago at which time the Central Plateau was buried beneath a large ice cap. Today, a crucial safe haven for the Clarence galaxias is created by the seams of ancient morainal rubble and debris that exclude introduced predator, the brown trout from the Skullbone Plains waterways.



Glacial moraine. Photo: Matthew Newton

## BUSHWALKS

All walks are relatively flat and mostly follow old four-wheel drive tracks.

### Skullbone Plains Walking Track

Walking time: allow 1 hr/3 km (starts at the Skullbone Plains Walking Track car park)

Vast vistas across the Skullbone Plains are contrasted beside intricate miniature landscapes, threaded with streams and runnels. While a relatively easy walk during dry conditions, this route will take much longer when wet underfoot. Without organising a car shuttle or pick-up, walkers will need to return along the same track.

### Kenneth Lagoon Loop

Walking time: allow at least 1 hr/3 km (starts and finishes at the main carpark)

Glacial moraines feature on this relatively flat walking track around Kenneth Lagoon. From October to December, the deep mauve, pea-like flowers of the mountain purplepea (*Hovea montana*) are in bloom. Look out for signs of wombat activity on the walk.

### Lake Ina Loop

Walking time: allow 3 hr/6.5 km (starts and finishes at the main car park)

This relatively flat walk passes through sedgelands, sphagnum peatlands and pockets of Miena cider gums. With a shoreline fringed with snowgums and pencil pines, remote Lake Ina is a highland jewel.

For a longer and more challenging full day walk, visitors can connect the Lake Ina and Kenneth Lagoon loop tracks.

## PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

- Avoid the spread of the root rot (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) and environmental weeds - please make sure footwear, camping equipment and vehicles are free from soil and debris
- Protect frog species from the devastating chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*), spread by contaminated water. As well as cleaning your boots, camping equipment and vehicle, please ensure they are dry. Do not introduce any water, tadpoles, frogs or plants to the area as you may spread the infection
- Be prepared for all weather and pack adequate clothing and equipment - conditions may change quickly
- Bring all food and some water with you
- You will not be in mobile phone network range in some areas, especially for non-Telstra clients
- Skullbone Plains and all the TLC reserves are closed on days of Total Fire Ban
- For access information and to book the Skullbone Plains tent platforms contact the TLC office
- Leave gates as you find them - if you find a gate shut and locked, please leave it shut and locked behind you
- To open the locked gates, orientate your key with the small round notch on the bottom of the padlock

