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ISSUE 164

A first ascent of Federation Peak
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A PADDLE
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HIKE

PADDLE

CLIMB

RIDE

Crossing one of the wider
sections of New River Gorge





To the end of the Earth A FIRST ASCENT OF FEDERATION PEAK

Words: Andy Ebert
Photos: Christoph Michel

*Andy Ebert and Christoph Michel
battle the wilds of Tasmania to
forge a new route to the summit
of Federation Peak*





Finding our way
through the often
debris-clogged
gorge forced us to
continually search
for new routes

Much of the gorge required constant vigilance to navigate the minefield of ankle breaking debris



The temperature hovers just above zero. Rain pours from our tarpaulin. The sound of thunder rumbles in the clouds high above us.

For the last twelve days, we have fought with all our strength to make it this far. But now we lay huddled beneath our nylon tarp, exhausted, defeated and cold. Our bodies can take no more, our food supplies will last just another few days. We have no more energy left to continue our battle against the elements. And yet our objective, the summit of Federation Peak, lies just 3.5 kilometres away. Christoph and I discuss our options. Although, deep down we both know that that 3.5 kilometres may as well be an eternity away. "Let's wait until tomorrow" we both agree, before falling into an exhausted and restless night of sleep.

By morning, little has changed. The rain continues to fall. We shiver in our cold and wet sleeping bags, staring listlessly at our soaking wet clothes, unable to dry in this cold, damp air. We have no choice, and with great reluctance I activate our emergency beacon and concede total defeat. Two hours later, we slump exhausted and deflated in the belly of our rescue helicopter and look down at the tangle of forest as we return to civilisation. The snow-covered peaks of the thousand-metre-high Arthur Range fade into the distance, while Federation Peak remains hidden behind a wall of cloud.

Two years have passed since our 2015 expedition, and even though we swore to never again attempt the same, we are back and ready to launch a new assault on this mountain.

A NEW ROUTE

At 1,224 metres, Federation Peak rises up as the highest peak on the Arthur Range of mountains in the isolated and wild region of southwest Tasmania. The only documented approach to the summit is from rarely used trail to the west, and even then, this trail is considered one of the toughest bushwalking challenges in Australia.

Heralding from the Bavarian mountains in Southern Germany, my climbing partner Christoph and I, have set ourselves a challenge of immeasurable difficulty. We want to forge a new route from the south, commencing on the Tasmanian coast, where New River spills into the Southern Ocean. We will then navigate inland up the New River gorge to the river's source in Lake Geeves, at the base of Federation Peak. Finally, we will

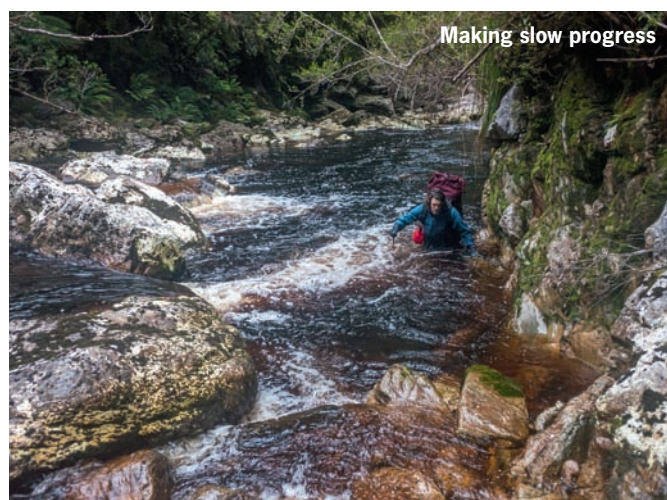
then have to find a route up the final 500-metres of near vertical cliffs and steep slopes to reach the base of the needle of rock that is the summit of Federation Peak.

The first documented exploration for a route inland from the south, occurred during the 1920s, however it was quickly abandoned due to the difficulties of the terrain. Two additional explorations in this area, and on which we relied on for information, were both documented in *Wild* (Chris Sharples and Grant Dixon's 1985 account in *Wild* 24 and John McLaine, Dax Noble and Graeme Pennicott's 2007 exploration in *Wild* 104). However, by our reckoning, if we were able to reach the summit of Federation Peak via New River, we would be the first to complete the ascent via this southern approach.

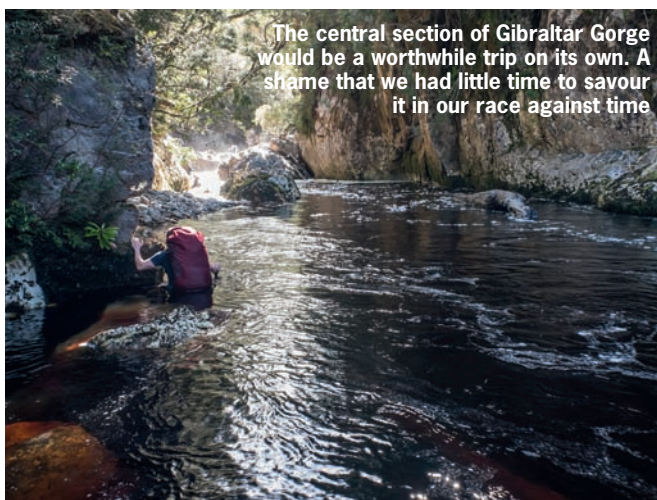
This time round we will be more prepared. In addition to the topographic maps we carried on our first attempt, we will now also carry satellite images of different sections of the hike. We will receive daily weather updates via SMS and we will wear more neoprene clothing to stay warm against the icy waters. Our packs have been specially sourced and modified to carry our enormous loads (35 kilograms) and will ensure the contents remain completely dry. We will sleep in hammocks to stay above the sodden ground, enabling us to pitch camp virtually anywhere. We will carry an improved inflatable raft to navigate much of the river, with our walking sticks being able to convert to paddles. Even our shoes have been modified, with steel spikes protruding from the soles, providing additional purchase on the slippery rocks. For months prior to our departure, we have been training regularly, carrying our heavy packs and dragging heavy loads along gravel roads. We have done everything we can to prepare for this journey. The only thing we cannot control is the weather. Despite returning in February, the 'dry' period, we know that we will invariably have to deal with rain.

WITH THE SUN ON OUR BACKS

The ocean pounds against Tasmania's southern coast. A leopard seal basks on the beach, the sun is high in the sky. We are back where it all began. It has taken two days of hiking to reach this point, although we have been following an established trail. Leaving the trail, we throw our huge packs into our inflatable raft and start to drag it through the shallow waters towards the mouth of New River and away from any semblance



Making slow progress



The central section of Gibraltar Gorge would be a worthwhile trip on its own. A shame that we had little time to savour it in our race against time



Wading the first metres of the New River, just past the Salisbury Junction



Often the river was too strong, forcing us to balance precariously along the river bank



Eyes focused on the slippery terrain, while passing a giant King Billy Pine



Back on solid ground. The final metres toward Lake Geeves

of civilisation, albeit just a marked trail. We're soon able to sit in the raft, and paddle across the lake and into the mouth of the river. We manage to paddle four kilometres upriver, before the first fallen trees block our path. Taking no chances, we unpack, carry our raft around the blockages, repack and then continue our journey.

We are making good progress, however it's not long before an almost impenetrable mesh of scrub forces us to shift our progress from solid ground and into the river. From now on, we'll primarily journey through the river as we make our way north. Nevertheless, we have made good time and are satisfied as we pitch our first camp, since departing the coast.

The following morning, the temperature has fallen to seven degrees, and the rain which has been falling steadily for most of the night, continues without let up. We break camp, and plunge back into the river, pushing against the current as we drag our raft forever onward. As we eat lunch later that day, the rain continues to fall heavily. We watch as the river starts to rise and we're quickly forced to retreat to higher ground. The current is now too strong for us to risk returning to the water and we are forced to wait out the rest of the day, hoping the river level will drop.

We rise early on our fourth day. The river level has dropped; although it often rises above our waist. We have to fight against the current, and the roar of the rapids often drowns out all conversation. Boulders, rocks and fallen trees are submerged in the swirling depths around us, and we often smash and bang our shins against unseen obstacles. On several occasions, we stumble and plunge completely into the icy waters. But we continue to push on, forever inching our way forward. Our progress is arduous, however by noon the terrain becomes noticeably steeper, marking our impending entry into Gibraltar Gorge.

We are soon forced to pack away our raft completely, as we commence the eight-kilometre journey through the spectacular gorge. We will constantly pack and unpack the raft as the conditions allow, evaluating the benefit of being able to float our gear for periods of time, versus having to carry our packs through the inhospitable gorge.

ENTER THE GORGE

Over millennia, the New River has carved its way through the rock, creating the Gibraltar Gorge. The river rages and froths as it forces its way down through the steep terrain. Deep within the canyon, the sounds of the river reverberate off the canyon walls, and the roar of the water is often deafening. It is here that we now find ourselves, crawling across hidden chasms across submerged rocks, jumping from boulder to boulder across turbulent rapids, and clambering across fallen trees forming bridges across the torrid waters below. We're often forced to climb ahead and then drag our packs over and up the boulders after us. On several occasions, we are able to deploy our raft, and avoid having to swim across deep pools. However, these are often short periods of respite, and we must once more pack away the raft and continue to carry our loads. Once we just swim across a deep pool, floating our packs in front of us.

We are making slow progress, just three to four kilometres per day, as we must constantly find a way around, over or

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A Kaitum on the coast of Tasmania.

Janne Riihela



An Akto on the coast of Japan.

Stefan Rosenboom/augenwege.de

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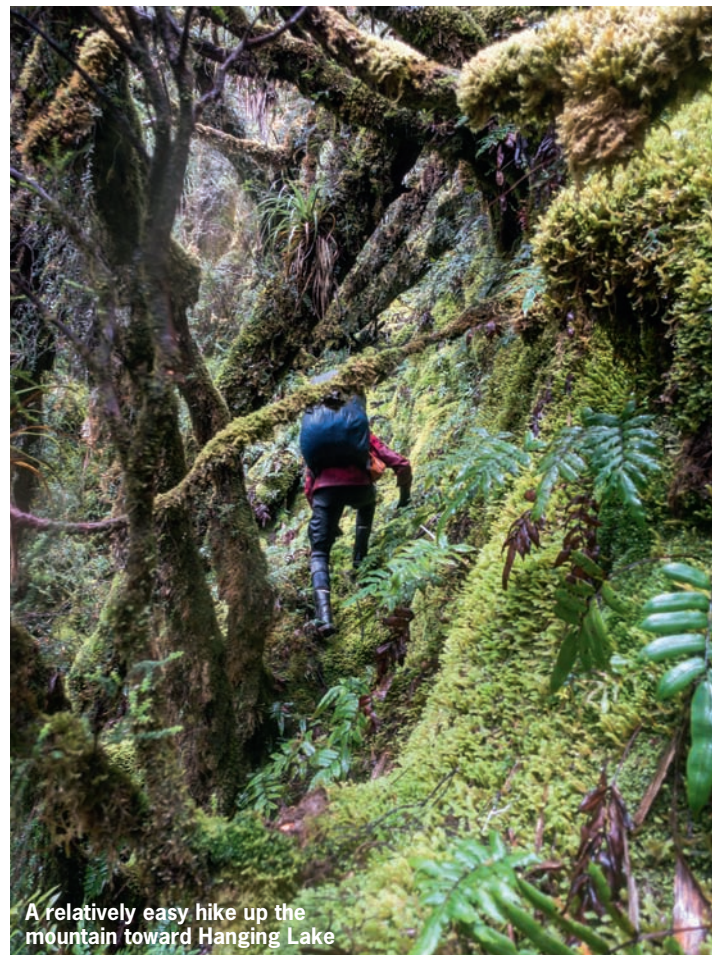
The tranquil waters of Lake Gevees provided a welcome relief and change for some rest



Our hammocks allowed us to stay above the wet and rough ground



Christoph searches for a route up the mountain



A relatively easy hike up the mountain toward Hanging Lake



**An unbelievable experience.
Paddling Lake Geeves beneath the
sheer cliffs of Federation Peak**



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under the lorry-sized boulders, wedged between canyon walls, blocking any obvious way forward. Our days oscillate between short spells of hiking, but consist mostly of crawling, scrambling, wading, paddling, balancing, rock hopping, sliding and jumping. All the while, we continue to be awed by this fabulous and secluded world we traverse. Lush ferns spill from the river banks around us, and all sorts of different trees reach toward the sky, often entangled in dark green creepers. Thick moss envelops the quartz boulders, which themselves often glisten white, rose, purple and green. Even the rain, which never ceases its monotonous downpour, glistens around us. And always, we follow the river, foaming a bright brown, roaring loudly as it thunders down the canyon. The entire climb through the canyon feels unearthly, yet is eerily beautiful.

However, our daily weather update is a constant reminder of our need to keep moving. The river is much higher than it was when we were last here several years ago. Without our hammocks, we would not be able to find anywhere camp each night while staying above the sodden ground. Nevertheless, we try to minimise how long we rest each night, always fearful of being stranded by the rising river. We push our way forward for 12-14 hours per day, before collapsing each night exhausted. I've picked up a nasty bout of diarrhoea, and we constantly pull away leaches crawling over our legs. Night temperatures drop to 4°C while the daytime temperature rarely climbs above 12°C.

But finally, on the third day in the canyon, we emerge from the gorge. The valley opens up, and the New River shrinks to the size of a mountain creek. At midday, we string up our tar-

paulin and take cover from the rain which has again begun to fall heavily. As we try to warm ourselves with hot soup and dry clothes, the temperatures drops to 5°C and hail begins to batter our shelter. We wait out the hail, but with the rain still falling, we put on our wet and cold clothes, pull on our soaking boots, and plunge back into the river.

That night we set up our camp again at our previous Camp 11. Only this time it is day seven, so our progress is good, despite the elements forever conspiring against us. As if to punish our good progress, the rain falls more heavily during the night and at 1am Christoph is awoken by the river beneath his hammock. The river has risen over a metre and he is forced to move to higher ground. Some hours later the same punishment befalls me and I am forced to carry all my gear barefoot through the icy water to find higher ground. Fearful of losing any of our essential gear to the river, I panic when I cannot find our essential saw. I finally locate it submerged beneath the water and carry it to our higher camp.

By morning we are both absolutely exhausted. Having hardly slept during the night, we are again cold and much of our gear is now wet and we decide to take the next day as a rest day. Even with a full day of rest, we are still spent on the following morning, and with the first rays of sun hitting our camp since leaving the coast more than a week ago, we decide to take another day of rest. We even manage to dry some of clothes during the short spell of good weather.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

The following day we enter into unknown territory. We have



The sun finally greets us. Pure relief as we have now passed the final crux of our climb



Finding our way through the constant undergrowth



Two-and-a-half days of pushing our way through the undergrowth

passed the point at which we were rescued on our previous attempt, and there is very little information about what lies ahead. Only a few people have ever been in this basin over the last hundred years.

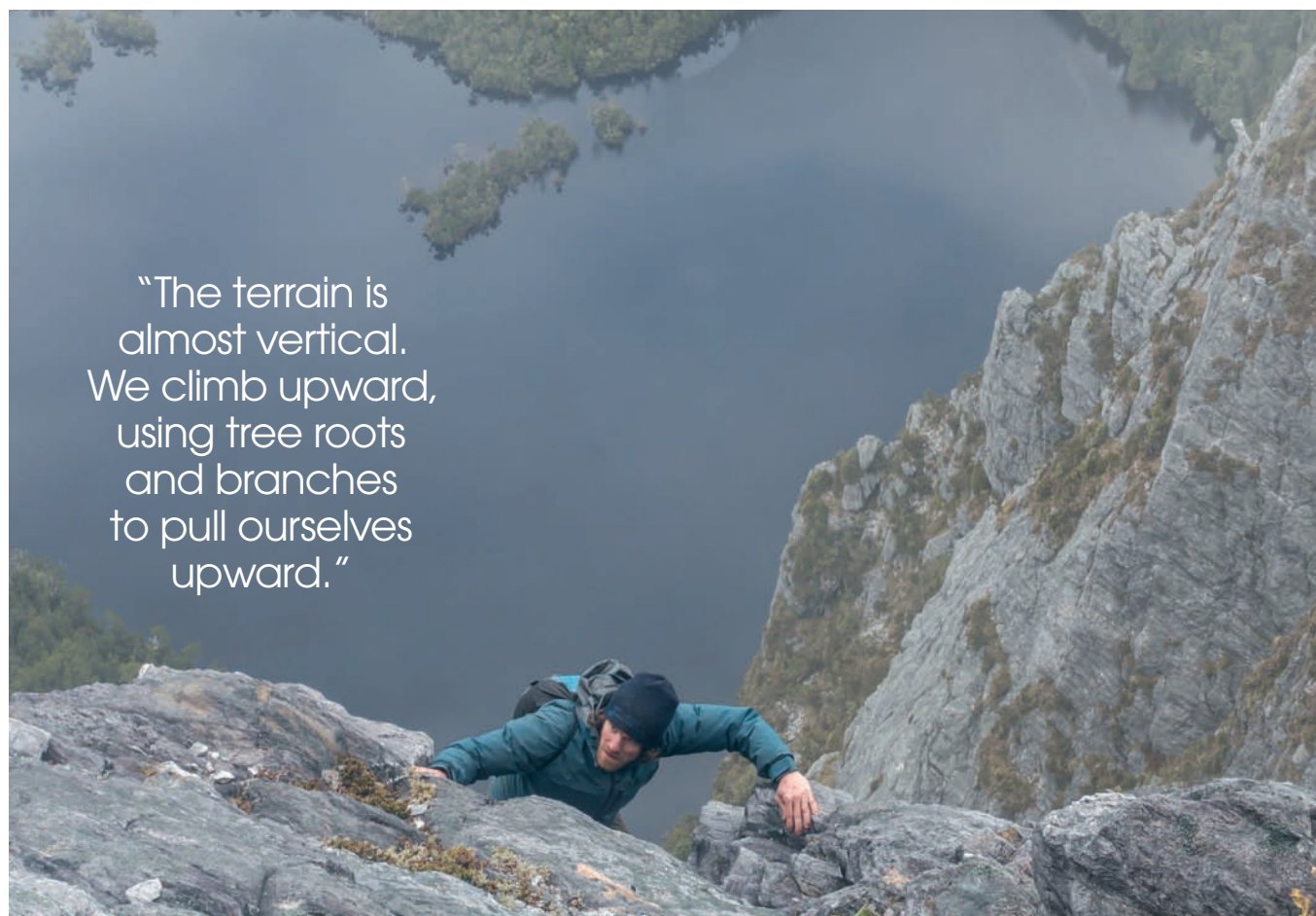
The heavily wooded New River is behind us, and now we face a dense wall of undergrowth. Every few metres the thickets become almost impassable and we are forced to hunch down and crawl through a hole in the undergrowth. Often, we do not even walk on the forest floor but instead balance on moss covered tree trunks that act as bridges above the ground. We are only managing about 200 metres per hour, however the sun is finally out and we feel reinvigorated. Early in the afternoon, the summit of Federation Peak suddenly comes into view and we are overjoyed. It feels within reach and may only be another four kilometres away.

After our brief euphoria, we return to the undergrowth, pushing forward metre by metre. Late in the afternoon, as we search for a way through another unknown gorge, the rain again begins to fall heavily. A waterfall cascades from the overhanging walls forcing us to exit the gorge via a scary climb up a slippery and mossy cliff. We find a place to erect our camp as night falls. We are just 2.8 kilometres away from Lake Gees, but we must be patient.

The following morning as we inch closer to the lake, we battle through a three-dimensional labyrinth of jungle thickets. Increasingly, we crawl on all fours, approaching our holy mountain grovelling on the ground like two pilgrims. The dense foliage makes it exceedingly difficult to determine exactly where we are, even with the assistance of our satellite



The final sections of trail to the summit of Federation Peak



"The terrain is almost vertical. We climb upward, using tree roots and branches to pull ourselves upward."

printouts. It takes almost the entire day pushing through the undergrowth before suddenly the sparkling waters of the lake reveal themselves. Cheerfully and tottering with joy, we walk the last meters to the shore of the lake. The calm and deep blue lake lies at our feet. And beyond it, the almost vertical rock face soars up to Federation Peak. We have arrived. We believe we are the first people here in decades.

THE FINAL PUSH

For the next one and half days, we camp by the lake recuperating for our final push to the summit. Our gaze is constantly drawn to the mountain on the far side of the lake. According to our map and satellite images, there is a steep gully that runs upward for 500 metres to the crest on the mountain range. This should lead us to Hanging Lake and connect us to the existing 'northern' approach to the summit of Federation Peak. This route will traverse above a sheer 100-metre cliff face. This final climb will require good judgement and some luck as we attempt to find a route through this completely unknown terrain. We are unsure whether we have bitten off more than we can chew with this final approach, and we speak sparingly as we eat our restricted rations. The outcome of this expedition is still too uncertain. We have already lost a lot of weight, our sleeping bags no longer keep us warm, and we spend another night shivering in the wet and cold.

The following morning, in dull weather we paddle silently across the lake. The rock face passes all too quickly, in this special and solitary place. As we pack away our raft for the last time, we remain nervous as to the way forward. With tired

legs and unsettled stomachs, we begin our climb upward. The vegetation is surprisingly light. Sometimes, it's almost as if we are walking on a mountain path. After one hour, we are already 150 metres above the lake when we enter into a steep gully. Just a trickle of water is all that remains of the New River. Somewhere above us, the source of the river will leech from the rock and begin its course toward the ocean. For us, we will pass this birth of a river and continue our journey upward.

Christoph does almost all the lead climbing, driven by the desire to find a route ahead. At several points, the terrain is almost vertical. We climb upward, using tree roots and branches to pull ourselves upward. Above and below, rocks hang over us, or drop away down a steep gully. These are often devoid of any vegetation, reminding us of the difficulty even plants find in finding purchase on this steep, rocky mountainside.

However, our altimeter continues to climb steadily and we soon leave the gully behind us and the climbing becomes easier. As if by some miracle, the sun bursts forth and dances across the swirling mists around us. Even a rainbow appears from nowhere in the clouds around us. After a few more hours, the vegetation completely dissipates and is replaced with grass and gravel.

Just six hours since departing earlier in the morning, and absolutely soaked wet to the skin and covered in dirt, we reach the grassy shores Hanging Lake and suddenly a network of established paths lead away and toward our final destination.

The following morning, standing on the summit of Federation Peak, we revel in the joy of having completed the first direct line ascent from the New River Lagoon to Federation Peak. We have a clear view across the wilds of southwest Tasmania. Far in the distance, we can see New River Lagoon, where it all started 12 days ago. We look across all those fantastic places we battled against just getting here. Far below us is Lake Geeves, desolate and pristine.

We are just so relieved, and can hardly believe that it's all over. A giant burden slides from our shoulders. This marks the end of a project which took more than three years to complete. Countless months of planning, worrying, hoping, yet constant joyful anticipation. The dejection after our first failed attempt several years ago and the worry that we may fail again. But now, here we stand, on the summit of Federation Peak, basking in the euphoria of having achieved this long sought after goal. **W**



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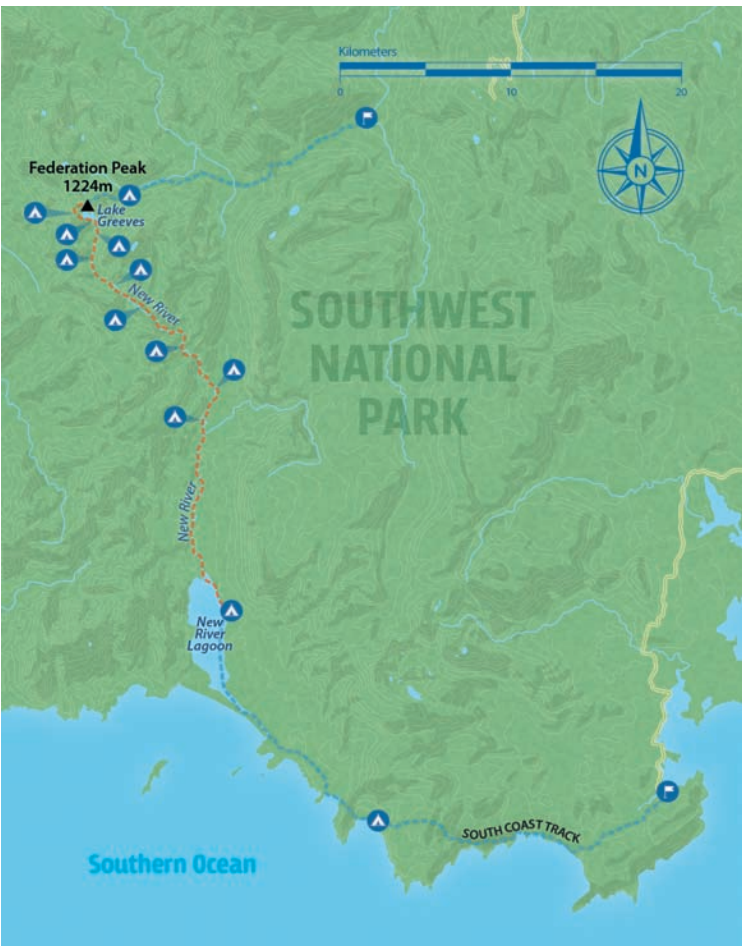


3 METRE GPS
ACCURACY



10 YEAR
WARRANTY





TRIP DETAILS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Duration: | 16 days |
| Total Distance: | ~91km (3300m ascent and 2930m descent) |
| South Coast Track: | 30km (1330m ascent/descent) |
| New River Lagoon to Federation Peak | 42km (~33km along New River) |
| | (1500m ascent) |
| Federation Peak to Farmhouse Creek: | 21km |
| | (500m ascent and 1600m descent) |

CONTRIBUTOR

Heralding from the Bavarian Alps, Germany, Andy and Christoph have travelled to Tasmania on four occasions and enjoy nothing more than getting as far away from civilisation as possible.



Our route toward
Hanging Lake

WILDERNESS WEAR

MerinoFusion Light 160 Rainforest

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PROVENANCE
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