

The Walk Along The Alum Cliffs

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The first recorded reference to the Alum Cliffs is in an Admiralty Chart, *Approaches to Hobart*, dated 1847. They were named for their geological characteristics. The rocks of the cliffs are Permian mudstones. These contain iron pyrites and as the rock weathers the pyrite oxidises and produces sulphuric acid which reacts with the limey clay to produce alum. Alum was, and is, used as a mordant in dyeing fabrics, particularly wool, where it helps to lock the colour into the wool fibres. As far as can be established, the alum present in the Cliffs has never been extracted for commercial purposes.

The date at which the Alum Cliffs Walk first appeared on maps has not been possible to ascertain. Certainly in recent times the walk appears on maps of the area as a track skirting along the cliff tops from Tarooma to Kingston. It is presumed that over the years local residents have gradually worn away a track and that this has eventually come to be recognised.

The track takes about three hours walking time one way. It passes along the top of the Alum Cliffs themselves and commands some spectacular views of the Derwent Estuary, east to the Tasman Peninsula and south to Bruny Island. In the vicinity of Bonnet Point some aboriginal middens may be seen, while on the ridge top extending from the Shot Tower stands the remains of the Mausoleum built by Joseph Moir, as well as the remains of his store for arsenic, antimony, sporting and blasting powder. The track no longer passes these ruins due to re-routing along the rocks at the base of the cliff.

In years gone by the cliff top vantage points would have overlooked much sea going traffic but the whaling boats, coastal traders and ferry steamers are seen no more. The river now only sees the few cargo ships that come to the port of Hobart, the occasional passenger liner or naval vessel, and, of course, the fishing boats and pleasure craft.

In the mid 1970s the track received its first major upgrading when the Kingborough Council, with funds from the Commonwealth Government under the Regional Employment Development Scheme, began re-construction of the track from Brown's River. The track was

upgraded to a point between Bonnet Point and Taronga until, unfortunately, funds ran out.

The second major upgrading of the track will take place in 1987-88, as the track has been included as part of a project undertaken by the Kingborough Bicentennial Committee. The Committee hopes to develop the track to a standard suitable both for active walkers as well as, for example, supervised cub groups. It is anticipated that the sections around the Tarooma foreshore and immediately north of Brown's River will be established to a standard suitable for family groups.

The Alum Cliffs have provided the residents of Tarooma and Kingston with a spectacular walk right on their doorstep. It is hoped that over the years community support will see that the informal tracks which extend both north and south from the present track will also be developed.

