To the lighthouse: a trip to Cape Nelson

To the lighthouse: we take a tour of the Cape Nelson Lighthouse.

Climbing the cape: Cape Bridgewater

After living in Tasmania for a time, the bar had been set very high for bushwalking. A visit to Cape Bridgewater, however, exceeded all expectations.

The view from the top of Cape Bridgewater back to the

bay is simply spectacular.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] E [/dropcap]xactly where the Great Ocean Road comes to an end in south-west Victoria is open to debate, but those who turn off too early – say, at Port Fairy – are missing one of the most spectacular beaches and cliff top walks in the state.

Cape Bridgewater is only 20km west of Portland and wraps itself around a long, crescent-shaped beach that is perfect in itself for a long walk, but the real joy lies in a two-hour return walk to the tip of the cape that takes in two seal colonies.

You can prime yourself for the walk ahead with a morning coffee at the charming Pickled Pelican café in Percy St, Portland – say that three times quickly – or breakfast at the funky Bridgewater Bay Café that has absolute waterfront views. (Unlike many beach cafes, this one is open all year round).

The walk starts with steps up from the carpark about 100m west of the café, although we still managed a wrong turn and ended up on a wheelchair ramp rather than the steps, which was slightly embarrassing.

The seal viewing platform gives a birds-eye view of the wildlife.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] F [/dropcap]rom the carpark, the track meanders high along the farmland boundary before descending to the shoreline where Seals by Sea Tours run seasonal boat trips out to the seal colonies, cutting the travel time to a few minutes. For those who like to walk, however, the trek is just beginning.

The track rises up to the cape in a steady climb, but is still steep enough in parts to work up a sweat on a warm day and requires a reasonable level of fitness (be sure to carry a water bottle, and binoculars are also handy).

The views as you move up and along the cliff face become increasingly spectacular and are equal to those of the more famous parts of the Great Ocean Road around Port Campbell and Peterborough.

[quote type = "center"] Allow time for plenty of stops to take photos, as on a clear day, the views across the bay are vast and breathtaking.[/quote]

While the scenery alone is worth the walk, Cape Bridgewater is

also home to the largest mainland colony of fur seals in Australia and there are two viewing platforms from which to watch them at rest and play.

The first platform overlooks a flat rock that is equivalent to a seal sun bed, while the second, at the end of the walk, looks down on a reef that the seals use for surfing (this is where the binoculars come in handy).

[quote type="center"] While wildlife is wonderfully unpredictable, we were lucky enough to see a dozen or more seals frolicking in the surf and catching waves like Kelly Slater.[/quote]

The geology of the area is also fascinating, with the tip of Cape Bridgewater actually part of a volcanic crater – such facts always make my head spin.

After a packed lunch, the return walk was less arduous, being mostly downhill, but equally as beautiful, with the mid-afternoon sun shimmering on the water.

This is a walk that is not too long, not too difficult, and very rewarding: perfect for a fine spring day.

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