

# Mount Wellington by Car



## Why I wrote this guide?

It is said that 300,000 people visit Mount Wellington each year. This is no doubt due to its unique situation – an alpine mountain located next to a temperate Australian capital city. You really can go from the surf to the snow in 20 minutes. What's more you can see the surf from the snow and vice versa. The views are awesome, the surroundings spectacular and the whole place is just made to be enjoyed.

Despite its obvious natural appeal and popularity, there are various suggestions about how it should be developed, with the most prominent of these being the idea for a cable car. The view has been expressed that we're not "making the most" of it, and that visitors need "something to do" when they get there.

To me the mountain seems to be quite popular without a need to enhance it artificially. I believe most tourists come here to see Tasmania rather than the same attractions they could see bigger and brighter elsewhere, and I've never been lost for something to do when presented with a view like that from the top of Mount Wellington. I think the mountain is probably a better tourist attraction without large-scale tourist infrastructure being built on it, but I do agree it needs a few low-key improvements to help tourists make the most of a visit.

If people really do return from their mountain visit feeling that there wasn't enough to do, then perhaps it is because they may not be entirely clear where things are, where they can stop for a view or a picnic, where they can take a walk that is within their capability. Some might not be warned to take a jumper, coat, hat and gloves when it looks nice and sunny down below. To some extent I think this is because there is a lack of signposting and information. Hence, I decided to at least try to address this problem with Mark's guide to finding enough to "do" on the mountain to make a visit worthwhile.

Really, there's a whole mountain's worth of stuff available. You could easily spend several days on the mountain, as long as you were happy to walk a lot. Anyone can find enough to enjoy a few hours in this magnificent natural environment, unrivalled in proximity to any other Australian city.

## Mount Wellington Introduction

There are plenty of books about Mount Wellington, so I won't try to repeat everything they say, this is more of a "how to enjoy Mount Wellington on its own terms" item. There are no shops on Mount Wellington, you can't buy anything up there, there are no "things" for the kids to do. Which is good because you can't spend any money up there.

Mount Wellington can be quite harsh weather-wise. It rises to 1271m, and at that height it's in the way of the Roaring Forties. There are mountains further south and west that get a bit more of a battering, but Mount Wellington cops the bad weather pretty much as well as most of Southwest Tasmania. I would recommend always taking a jumper and waterproof coat, probably a hat and gloves on a cool or damp day. Otherwise you might want to just sit in the car. Part of the Mount Wellington experience is the weather anyway. You might find it's a warm sunny day, still and clear, and you'll be able to walk around in a shirt and shorts. Then again, it might be cloudy, sleeting, and blowing so hard that you can't stand up. You will probably find the lower parts of the mountain more hospitable on days like that, but it can be pretty impressive just to experience the Antarctic blast on a wild day at the summit. Be careful though, the wind can damage car doors and car occupants. For example on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2012, a gust of 156km/h was recorded. Billy Connolly said there was no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothing. Take the right clothing up Mount Wellington to test out his theory. You can check current conditions at the Bureau of Meteorology's website.

Fortunately there's a road to the top, but it is narrow and winding in places. It has steep drop-offs but good cable barriers. You will want to drive carefully, and walkers and cyclists will thank you for it. Most people drive up and down without incident. Overall, the drive is really a great part of the experience. You may want to share the driving, as looking at the view while driving is not recommended. Be prepared to stop to enjoy the views.

There are various places to stop along the road, some good, some not. I will try to note for you all the places where it may be worth stopping, but some of the parking areas are tiny and/or dubious. Use your own judgement, and make sure you actually park entirely off the road. Other vehicles will need the whole width, as you will see. If you stop in the roadway, you may cause a problem, even a hazard if you are stopped around a blind corner. If the road is snowy or icy, it will have an extra level of difficulty. Many people stay off it at such times, and you may find it is closed at some point. There are signs to warn of this as you approach the mountain.

## Using this guide

You might be someone with a couple of hours to spare, who just wants to get out of the car a few times to look at the view, and walk on fairly level ground in your normal shoes. Then again, you might have all day, want to get out and see all the wild and rough tracks on the mountain, and be happy to clamber up and down anything in all kinds of weather. You might also be somewhere in between, and I'll try to cater to all tastes. When there's a walk to do, I'll try to let you know what you're in for.

Longer walks will be added later, taking from 90 minutes to half a day or longer. These will require a decent level of fitness and proper clothing. Some experience in the bush is recommended.

I've put this info into a Google map as well, and you can use either or both. I use Google Maps on Android to access the map while out and about. If you want, just print out the pages from this document with the drive description, or print the whole thing. Google Map at <http://goo.gl/maps/Kg5rM>

I also suggest that if you want to spend the whole day or longer on the mountain, and especially if planning to do the longer walks, go and buy the Mount Wellington Recreation Map. Sold wherever maps are sold, but especially at Hobart Service Tasmania and the Hobart Map Shop. You might also find that the Wildside Café at Ferntree has them.

Distances shown against items are from the intersection of Huon Rd with Pillinger Drive, zero the tripmeter as you turn if you like, it may not be necessary.

## Drive description

From the city, get onto Davey St, get in the right hand lane and continue straight ahead. The last set of traffic lights is where you really need to go straight ahead. Make sure you don't head left in the dual lanes onto the Southern Outlet heading for Kingston. (If you do, don't panic, drive up the hill and turn off left to Mount Nelson then return down the hill and turn left again, back onto Davey St.)

Having avoided driving towards Kingston, you now just follow Davey St as it becomes the Huon Road and heads to Ferntree. There is a sign some way up here which will warn you if any of the gates on the mountain road are closed. If they are, usually for snow and ice, decide for yourself if you want to proceed anyway. You can always park somewhere below the closed gate and walk.

To head straight up the mountain, turn right up Pillinger Drive in a sharp switchback corner which is well signposted. If your vehicle can't make this tight turn, proceed along the Huon Road a short distance, to the Ferntree Tavern carpark which specifically enables buses to turn. (Optional) Instead of turning up there immediately, you can proceed a little further along the Huon Road to the **[1] CBD of Ferntree** before heading up the mountain where you will find:

**[1a] The Fern Glade Carpark** – This is the best place to park if walking from Ferntree. There are various walks from this point, including the main walk to the summit.

**[1b] Wildside Café** – Stock up here with lunch or snacks, or visit for a coffee and a feed afterwards. Open seven days, 8am to 7pm. They have indoor and outdoor seating, and a range of food and drink. It's warm indoors. As at late October 2012, they had put some huge maps of Mt Wellington park on the walls, which would be very useful for intending walkers. See them here

<http://ferntree.tas.au/directory/fern-tree-general-store-and-cafe>

**[1c] Ferntree Tavern** – A good spot for a feed and/or beverages afterwards. Larger vehicles use the carpark as a turning circle. Open 10am to late, 7 days a week. See them here

<http://www.ferntreetavern.com.au/> or phone on (03) 6239 1171.

**[1d] Ferntree Park** – Over the main road from the tavern, this is a good lunch spot. There's a playground for the kids, rudimentary toilets, a shelter with a fireplace, tables and chairs, and 3 wood-fired BBQs. Several walks also commence here, including the short walk to Silver Falls.

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### Silver Falls Short Walk – 30 mins return

ALONG 4WD TRACK THROUGH FOREST TO SMALL WATERFALL, EVEN SURFACE WITH MODERATE CLIMBING.

Park at the Fern Glade parking area and walk around the road carefully to the entrance to Ferntree Park. Alternatively, park in the short road running between the tavern and the café if there is room. There is some space across the road from the bus stop.

Enter the park and turn left. The track is wide and easy, and after about ten minutes reaches an intersection. Turn right and climb to Silver Falls. The water cascades down a mudstone and sandstone cliff. The falls may have been higher in past years, as the base may have been filled in after flooding. Retrace your steps to Ferntree.

Along the track there are various artefacts of Hobart's water supply infrastructure, and it is worth pausing to read the signs.

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**[2]** At some point you will **head up Pillinger Drive**. Just above the intersection is a sign advising of road closures. Care is required driving amongst the houses which stretch a short way up the road.

**[3] The Bracken Lane Carpark** (0.8 km) – Driving beyond the end of the houses, this small parking area is on the right. Park here to walk to O'Gradys Falls. Don't block the fire trail.

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### O'Gradys Falls Short Walk – 35 mins return

MAINLY ALONG 4WD TRACKS THROUGH FOREST TO WATERFALL, VIEWS OF MOUNTAIN, SOME CLIMBING, SOME UNEVEN SURFACES.

Park at the Bracken lane carpark.

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Head off down the Bracken Lane Fire Trail. Bear left on the higher track at the fork reached after about 5 minutes, where there is also a sign, and head onto the O'Gradys Falls Track. This affords good views to the imposing Organ Pipes high above, and ends at an intersection, beyond which the sign indicates continuation to the falls slightly to the left on the Betts Vale Track. This narrower walking track takes you shortly to O'Gradys Falls. Retrace your steps to the car. It is unclear whether the falls are actually natural, or may have been modified to improve the 'cascade'.

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**[4] Radfords Track Carpark (1.25 km)** – Continuing up the road, there's a small parking area on the left where Radfords Track crosses the road.

**[5] Woods Track Carpark (2 km)** – A little further, there is a small carpark on the left hand side just past Woods Track. You can walk carefully back down the road, and then steeply uphill to find Rocky Whelans Cave.

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#### **Rocky Whelans Cave Short Walk – 15 mins return**

SHORT STEEP CLIMB ON UNEVEN SURFACES THROUGH FOREST TO SMALL CAVE/OVERHANG IN SANDSTONE CLIFF.

Park at the Woods Track carpark.

Walk up the steep Woods Track for about 150m. There is a narrow track marked for Rocky Whelans Cave to the right heading up a bank. The cave is just a minute or so along here, in a sandstone formation. It is not really clear whether Rocky Whelan, a bushranger who was hanged for murder, ever used this cave. It would provide some shelter in the rain, but it wouldn't be too comfortable. Some historians believe he probably used another cave closer to present-day Kingston.

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**[6] Carpark for the Octopus Tree (2.6 km)** – Further along, a medium-sized carpark is just below the hairpin. The walking track to the Octopus Tree leaves behind the barrier on the tight bend. This is the Shoobridge Track which also leads to various other locations on the eastern face of the mountain.

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#### **Octopus Tree Short Walk – 15 mins return**

WALK THROUGH FOREST ON NARROW TRACK TO WHERE A HUGE EUCALYPT GROWS ON A BOULDER, SOME CLIMBING AND SOME UNEVEN SURFACES.

Park at the Octopus Tree Carpark just below Shoobridge Bend.

Shoobridge Track leaves on the outside of the hairpin bend – take care with the traffic here. Walk along Shoobridge Track through the damp forest, taking the left fork where the Circle Track departs to the right. The forest here has great fungi in autumn. The Octopus Tree is signposted just to the right of the track. It is a huge eucalypt which has grown on top of a large boulder, and its roots drape around the boulder looking like a monster octopus. Shoobridge Track continues and Sphinx Rock, the Lenah Valley Track and Junction cabin can be accessed.

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**[7] Roadside Springs Lookout (4 km)** – Driving about another 1.4km, you will find a low wall on the left on a tight bend, with space for a few cars to park. The view is available here for no effort whatsoever. If you're OK to walk for a couple of minutes, I suggest driving a little further.

**[8] Springs Lookout Carpark (4.2 km)** – Another 200m up the road, the carpark on the right allows easy access to the main lookout, as well as being closest to the North-South Cycle Track. Sometimes there's space here when the main carpark is busy. I recommend a walk to the lookout, which is signposted. You can walk from here to the main Springs site a couple of minutes through the trees. Also, this is the start of the North-South Track, a cycle track that descends to the Glenorchy Mountain Bike Park.

**[9] The Springs (4.3 km)** – Driving another 100m you will find the main Springs carpark. I still recommend walking back to the lookout. It can be busy here, and if there's no space, you can also park at the Upper Carpark as long as you're OK to walk back down the hill a short way. At this main Springs site there is a shelter hut with fireplace, toilets, information signs, places to sit and eat lunch, a water tap\* and the start of several walking tracks. I recommend a walk to Sphinx Rock for walkers. (\*The water taps here and at The Chalet are untreated and fresh out of the mountain streams. The Council have put big warning signs on them to cover themselves in case you have a delicate constitution. I drink the water and I think most local walkers do too, but

then we might be immune to any bugs after all these years.) The walk to Sphinx Rock commences from here along the Lenah Valley Track.

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### **Sphinx Rock Short Walk – 40-45 mins return**

WALK ALONG WELL MADE TRACKS THROUGH ATTRACTIVE FOREST TO A VIEWPOINT ABOVE A SANDSTONE CLIFF, MINIMAL CLIMBING, EVEN SURFACES. Park at The Springs main carpark, or walk here from one of the others. The track leaves behind the toilet block.

This is the Lenah Valley Track, and will lead you all the way to Lenah Valley eventually. Walk first gently uphill and then level and gently downhill through lovely forest for 15-20 minutes. You will find a turnoff to the right. There is a steep cliff here, so keep kids close. Access is through a kid-proof gate to minimise the chance of accidents. Sphinx Rock is a small cliff (large enough to kill you) in the sandstone underlying the dolerite which forms the upper part of the mountain. There are good views from here, and there can often be views here when there are few elsewhere on the mountain.

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**[10] Upper Springs Carpark and Springs Hotel site (4.6 km)** – Drive up the one-way access road opposite the main carpark and have a look at the site of the old Springs Hotel. It's worth getting out and doing some exploration around the grassy area. Great place for a hotel hey? Maybe, but the substantial hotel that was here was never very successful financially, and then burnt down. The view of the mountain is good from here, and it's a quieter place to have lunch than the lower carpark. Some longer walks depart from this carpark up the set of steps to the right of the open hotel site. This is the main route up the mountain from The Springs.

**[11] Climbers Carpark (6.9 km)** – The road now heads along the front of the mountain. Some distance up the road, you will detect that this small parking area is near when you see a "turning traffic" sign. This carpark is useless for most of us. It is small and pokey and has room for 5 cars if they're parked strictly in accordance with the diagram on the sign. However, it allows climbers quicker access to the Organ Pipes up a very steep track. The rest of us have better ways to get to the Organ Pipes, and may only want to use this carpark if it's empty and we want to get a photo from here. If so, look out for traffic, and there are better photo spots anyway.

**[12] The Chalet (8 km)** – Continuing up the hill, the road turns around the curve of the mountain, and you will find good carparks on both side of the road at the Chalet. Watch the kids when you get out, some of the cars zoom down here, as do the push bikes. A couple of walks depart from here, but the main attraction is the "Chalet" which is a good shelter with woodfired barbecue, tables and chairs, and a fireplace. Sometimes the fire will be going on a wet or cold day, which is lovely. Tends to interrupt the walk for a while. This is a good spot to stop for lunch or other breaks, especially on rainy, windy or cloudy days. A good walk to the Organ Pipes can be undertaken from here. Other tracks also depart this point, including Hunters Track heading downhill and a very steep concealed track to the summit. You can collect drinking water here from a pipe with a tap just above the roadside waterfall, or from the waterfall itself. Same health warning applies here as at The Springs.

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### **Organ Pipes Short Walk – 45-60 mins return**

WALK ON THE FACE OF THE MOUNTAIN TO ARRIVE BENEATH THE ORGAN PIPE CLIFFS, MODERATE CLIMBING, UNEVEN SURFACES INCLUDING BOULDERS.. Park at The Chalet. The track leaves up the left hand side of the shelter.

Climb steeply up the hill behind The Chalet, and cross the small creek where the track turns left. Walk along here for 20 minutes or so, until you find yourself closely beneath the Organ Pipes to your right. You can walk along further if you like, or turn back when you've seen enough or used enough time. There are good views from here. The track is bouldery in places, and can be damp underfoot at times.

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**[13] Panorama Track Carpark (8.9 km)** – Continuing above the Chalet, the road heads for a distance away from the summit and out onto Mount Arthur. Here you will find a small carpark on the right. Stop here to walk up the Panorama Track.

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### **Panorama Track Short Walk – 50-60 mins return (but longer with variants described)**

CLIMB THROUGH ALPINE FOREST WITH GREAT VIEWS, MODERATE AND STEEP CLIMBS MAINLY ON UNEVEN SURFACES.

Park in the small carpark near the lower end of the Panorama Track. The track leaves about 50m up the road on the left.

Follow the track as it winds upwards through button grass, boulders and snow gum forest to rejoin the road about 1 km below the Pinnacle. This track is rough underfoot in many places, and can be quite wet, muddy and slippery. The walk as noted then just retraces your outward steps. However, you can continue walking once you rejoin the road and walk to the Pinnacle if you wish, or walk back down the road. If you walk down to Luckmans Hut (see below), it is possible to continue down past Luckmans Hut and rejoin the Panorama Track, but the track is quite indistinct. Please note that in poor visibility navigational skills may be useful.

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**[14] Blockstream Carpark (9.1 km)** – Just a short way beyond the Panorama Track, this carpark on the left sits where a view can be had of Hobart below what is known as a "blockstream". Here a field of dolerite boulders can be seen above and below the road. The stream is actually slowly moving downhill as the boulders weather. This slow process would see the road disappear one day without maintenance.

**[15] Lost World Carpark (9.4 km)** – Only a few hundred metres further the road turns sharply back towards the summit, below Mount Arthur. There's room for two or three cars in a poor carpark inside the corner, depending on how well people park. However getting out of the carpark afterwards can be tricky. You can also park at the Blockstream Carpark below here, or the larger carpark above here and walk along the road a little way. The Lost World Track starts on the outside of the tight corner (see longer walks, coming soon). The track to Collins Bonnet starts on the East-West Fire Trail a few metres above the corner (also see longer walks).

**[16] Large Carpark (10 km)** – This part of the mountain is now very open, with only sparse and low tree cover. It can be very exposed here. The road now heads back towards the summit, and you will find a large carpark. This can be a good spot to get out and explore, especially if there is a bit of snow about. A rough, poorly marked and often wet track leaves here for Thark Ridge and Mount Montagu (see longer walks). This track should be left to those with experience, plenty of time, good equipment and navigational knowledge. In the snow, this can be a good spot to stop and play. It may be less exposed than the summit, and possibly less busy.

**[17] Luckmans Hut (or Skating Rink) Carpark (10.5 km)** – Another 500m up the hill from the large carpark, several small and rough spaces for cars can be found on the left hand side. Short walks to Luckmans Hut and the old skating rink can be made from here.

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#### **Luckmans Hut (10 mins) and Skating Rink (5 mins) Short Walks**

TWO VERY SHORT WALKS HIGH ON THE MOUNTAIN, OFF-TRACK AND ON MINOR PAD, SOME CLIMBING AND UNEVEN SURFACES.

Park in one of the scrappy spaces on the left of the road.

Luckmans Hut is below the road. Find a faint pad heading down the open alpine herb field. Luckmans Hut is about five minutes down here. You can continue past the Hut and rejoin the Panorama Track.

The Skating Rink is on the other side of the road, only about 75m from the corner. Head roughly southwards across the heath. It's a bit rough and wet in places. The skating rink is a quite obvious concrete structure, built in the late 1930s. It is truly tiny, so was probably not used for very spectacular skating.

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**[18] Upper Panorama Track Carpark (11.5 km)** – Another kilometre up the hill, this tiny carpark is on the right, near the top of the Panorama Track which arrives at the road from the left. There are several very small parking spaces along the uphill-side of the road between here and the summit.

**[19] Mount Wellington Summit (12 km)** – Finally you will arrive at the summit. There is a one-way system which means you drive clockwise around the pinnacle to find the carpark. A number of features here are worth visiting, apart from just sitting anywhere you like and marvelling at the view. Some people have trouble with car remote locking here. If so, there are instructions inside the visitor shelter for solving the problem.

**[19a] The Pinnacle itself** – You should climb up here if you can, especially if you have walked to the top! On top is a "trig" point. The "point" is actually the metal point in the ground, and the pyramid

structure above it enables people at distant locations to see it (with good optics). They were used for trigonometric surveying, and are largely useless in the GPS age. This one is most useful for holding onto as you climb to the top.

**[19b] Visitor Shelter** – Overlooks Hobart east of the carpark, and has interpretive panels inside along with a panoramic guide to what you can see. This latter is complete with errors however.

**[19c] Summit Boardwalk** – This runs down beside the visitor shelter. Great views can be had from here on clear days, and it is worth a walk for those who can.

**[19d] Walk around the roadway** – It is worth walking all around and seeing the views in all directions. Keen walkers will be able to spy walking destinations all over the place.

**[19e] Westerly viewpoint** – To the west of the carpark, this view looks out across the plateau. There is information here about the aboriginal history of the mountain. I think there is room to put in some information about what can be seen from here. I'm going to do an online panorama to name the mountains you can see.

**[19f] Walkers' Hut** – You can see this on the right of the road below the pinnacle as you arrive. Rough shelter, but away from the crowds.

**[19g] Walking Tracks** – To the south of the carpark, beside the compound around the large concrete transmission tower a walking track heads away. This is the top of the Zig Zag Track, and it also leads to the track across the summit plateau to South Wellington.

**[19h] Toilets** – These are new in 2012 and quite nice.

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### **Zig Zag Track Short Walk – 10-60 minutes**

A WELL-MADE TRACK TO START WITH, HAS GREAT VIEWS. SOON HEADS STEEPLY DOWNHILL BECOMING ROUGHER. WALK AS FAR AS YOU LIKE.

Having parked at the summit, the Zig Zag Track heads southwards next to the enclosure around the tall transmission tower. If you are going to do the Plateau Walk (next walk) you'll probably leave this one, unless you particularly want to walk everywhere.

The Zig Zag Track takes you a little (or a long) way downhill on the front (east) face of the mountain. Head along this track which gradually steepens and becomes rougher. You can walk as far down here as you like, bearing in mind that unless someone has gone down with the car, you're going to have to walk back up. (In fact, you *can* walk all the way down to The Springs or Freetree from here if you have someone to take the car down.) The vegetation is interesting, and the views are quite spectacular, with the vista framed or bordered by the steep mountainsides.

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### **Summit Plateau Short Walk – 30-100 minutes**

A ROUGHER WALK ON THE EXPOSED PLATEAU, TRACK MARKED BY SNOW POLES. SUPERB VIEWS AND LOVELY ALPINE ENVIRONMENT.

**WARNING: THIS WALK IS VERY EXPOSED TO POOR WEATHER, AND NAVIGATION CAN BECOME DIFFICULT IF CLOUD DESCENDS.**

This walk also departs alongside the transmission tower enclosure to the south. This track is rough and in places poorly marked. In poor weather you can easily become lost. I strongly suggest you only undertake this walk on clear gentle days unless you know what you are doing. People DO become lost on this mountain. If the cloud comes down, you are going to find it very disorienting. This part of the mountain is extremely exposed in poor weather. If you walk far enough across the top of the mountain you actually come to the site of the Smith Monument. Dr Smith got lost when walking with friends and was never found again. Please also take warm and waterproof clothing and your mobile phone. Bear in mind that there are spots here where mobile phones don't actually work. A GPS with charged batteries will assist in retracing your steps if required.

The track to South Wellington is marked about 200m along the Zig Zag Track, and heads obliquely off to the right. There are poles all the way along this track, although in places they are hard to find. Follow the track for as long as you like. Eventually it descends quite a lot to South Wellington, but this is described in the longer walks. The views are good from various points, and you can turn left and head out to the steep edges to sit and look at the views anytime you like. After about 45 minutes you will come to a sign pointing left to the Rocking Stone. This spot provides good views, although the large perched boulder no longer rocks, its "plinth" having moved in recent years. Take care to retrace your steps accurately. There are views to south from along this track that can't be obtained from the summit, and the plateau vegetation and boulders are interesting and stark.

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If you have limited time, can I suggest the following three walks as being the best to undertake.

1. Summit Plateau or Zig Zag Track
2. Organ Pipes
3. Sphinx Rock

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