

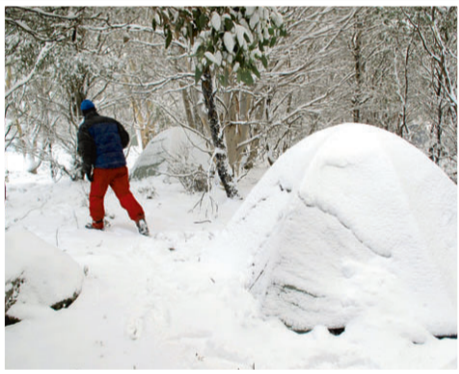
# Skullbone

Skullbone Plains in the evening light.

## Teacher Andrew Hughes took students from four schools on his latest adventure

**T**he Skullbone Plains property rambles over 1600 hectares and is only 10km east of the world famous Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park... as the currawong flies. The task for selected Tasmanian students undertaking the Bookend Trust's Skullbone program in 2011 was to endure, explore and report on what they discovered in this challenging highland wonderland.

The pilot Skullbone project saw groups of high school students from Ogilvie, Jordan River, Ulverstone and Scottsdale explore Tasmania's Central Highlands and Tarkine regions in October and November. Carrying on the tradition of the Bookend Trust's Expedition Class in sharing these journeys with others through online and multimedia productions, the students logged, blogged, photographed and filmed their experiences.



Scottsdale High expedition members endured heavy snowfall and very harsh conditions as they explored Skullbone Plains.

### Cold snap

October in Tasmania brings a mixture of weather. It can be sunshine and a light breeze or sideways rain, hail, snow and howling winds. In the first few days of the first expedition the Scottsdale High School team was blasted by a cold snap that saw temperatures plummet to -3C with 10cm of snow blanketing the tents, trees and grassy plains.

### Things to explore

■ The Bureau of Meteorology has weather stations dotted around Tasmania, recording things such as minimum and maximum temperature, rainfall and daily sunshine hours. Follow the link below and find the closest weather observation station to your home or school. What was the coldest day this month and year in your area? [www.bom.gov.au/tas/tas-observations-map.shtml](http://www.bom.gov.au/tas/tas-observations-map.shtml)

### Camp cooks

On expedition, everyone has to have a go at cooking. We use simple fuel stoves that hold the pot over a burning tub of methylated spirits. In cold weather water takes a long time to boil and there are only limited choices for ingredients. The basic foods for dinner were pasta, tuna, parmesan cheese, noodles, snow peas, carrots, packet soups and curry powder.



Scottsdale High students being filmed at Skullbone Plains in snowy conditions.

### Things to explore

■ Create and test an expedition recipe that can be cooked on a simple stove in the bush. Think carefully about which ingredients to use so that it's nutritious and gives you enough energy for all the walking you'll be doing.

### Candid camera

Skullbone Plains hides many animal treasures from human eyes because in Tasmania lots of our critters are nocturnal. One way to discover what hops, ambles and shambles through the night is to use remote sensing cameras. They are attached to a tree in a waterproof box and have a motion sensor that triggers the camera to take a photo when an animal walks past. Every evening students set the cameras and baited them with a variety of foods to attract carnivorous (meat eating) and herbivorous (plant eating) animals. Those captured by photograph included brushtail possum, Bennett's wallaby, pademelon, Tasmanian devil and forest raven. During daylight hours we also observed wombats, wolf spiders, yellow wattlebirds, currawongs, common froglets and white lipped whip snakes.

### Things to explore

■ Research these animals to see if they might live near you. Create a species list of the animals that can be seen in your area. [www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/ThemeNodes/LBUN-5362MH?open](http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/ThemeNodes/LBUN-5362MH?open)



Sarah Pate from the Ogilvie High School expedition team sets up and tests a remote sensing camera at Skullbone Plains.

### Pineapple Grass Swamp

The Ogilvie High School and Jordan River Federation teams investigated the Pineapple Grass Swamp (not an official name – we made it up!) that has formed in the wet plain at the head of Kenneth Lagoon. Pineapple grass isn't actually a grass at all, it's closer to a lily with tough leathery leaves that forms bright red fruits at the base of the tufts. We searched for the fruits that some people say taste a bit like watermelon, but could only find a few. Most will ripen later in the year.

### Things to explore

■ Research another native Tasmanian plant that can be used as bush tucker.



Student Kirk and Jordan River Learning Federation teacher Dennis Georgakis pick their way across the pineapple grass swamp at Skullbone Plains.

### She-oak skink

Sitting around camp one night Trent from the Jordan River Learning Federation spotted what looked like a small snake. With further investigation we discovered it most definitely had legs and was in fact a lizard. It looked like the common skinks we'd seen darting off the warming dolerite rocks but it was much bigger. Under threat it pushed its legs beside its body and stuck a deep



Suspected she-oak skink found at Skullbone Plains.

blue tongue out. We posted a photo to Mike Driessen, a Tasmanian wildlife expert, and he informed us it was a she-oak skink. They're common but not often seen as they shelter amongst low, dense vegetation.

### Things to explore

■ Find a quiet place in the school or a nearby bushland area. Sit and sketch the landscape and record what you see and hear. Look on the ground for insects and beetles that you can't see unless you get down on your hands and knees. Take photos and try to identify them.

### Maps and compasses

There are some roads and tracks through Skullbone Plains but most of the area is wild country. To get from place to place the students had to navigate using a map, compass and sometimes GPS. Getting used to reading a map is a great skill to have and it takes a lot of practise. We used topographic maps. That means they show natural features like forests, plains, rivers and lakes, and man-made features like huts and roads. Topographic maps also show contour lines which show how far above sea level things are (elevation). Skullbone Plains is about 1000m above sea level but at the top of hills you can be higher than this and in the valleys you can be lower.



Student Maddie leads Ogilvie High School explorers through thick bush at Skullbone Plains.

### Things to explore

■ Draw an imaginary map of Skullbone Plains and include some of the following features (some are real, some are not!); Carnivorous Creek, Rapids River, Skullbone campsite, Kenneth Lagoon, Pineapple Grass Swamp, Banana Tarn, Cabbage Gum Forest, Plains of Doom. Show a scale, north arrow and key. Have a go at making a map online <http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/mapping/outline-map/>

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