

SOLO PILGRIMAGE TO LAKE PEDDER, 1972

By Winston Nikols

Maybe fate has it that my likely last trip into Lake Pedder should be horrible. Maybe this will prevent me from thinking longingly about it, but I had to see it one more time.

Nevertheless, I am sitting in my car at 4:00 pm Good Friday at Condominium Creek below Mount Anne, thoroughly dejected. My trip started well with a pleasant drive over the Great Lake highway in brilliant moonlight. Then clouds rolled in and over the next two hours misty rain fell. I drove as far as Maydena, where I arrived at midnight. I was feeling tired but otherwise OK, so I made a drink and crawled into my sleeping bag. At 6:15 am I rose, forced some breakfast down and continued my drive. Along the road a severe migraine hit me and I struggled along to the Scotts Peak Road, down as far as this place and tried to shake it off. All day I dozed on and off, feeling quite annoyed with myself. Late in the day my appetite started to return so I ate half an apple and a biscuit. What I would do the next day would depend on a good sleep that night and a decent meal. Mount Anne and Mount Eliza have been clear all day so I thought I might call off Pedder and climb Mount Eliza if my fitness bothered me. Dozens of cars roared along the road toward the Scotts Peak Dam during the day. I was still feeling uneasy about my physical shape but, I had nothing to worry about.

At the end of the road, on the hill-top car park, I was struck by the 20 km. Lake Edgar fault line heading away southwards from me. It runs in a straight line, with the land on the western side having been lifted by several metres. It is an active fault and has been the source of frequent earthquakes, some in recent times. It's interesting that two major dams, the Edgar and the Scotts Peak dam, have been constructed so close to this geologically unstable area. Sadly, I didn't take a photo?

Time passed and my diary records, "I am writing this from beside my campfire on the shore of Lake Pedder. I had a small meal last night and slept well. This morning I was up at 6:00 am, had a light breakfast and drove to the end of the road. At the end of Scotts Peak road I organized my pack and left the car at 7:30 stepping onto the beach 3¼ hours later."

I headed down onto Huon Plains with Scotts Peak on the right and Mount Solitary in the distance. Lake Pedder was beyond that. The button grass plains were cut by numerous small creeks. Some recent simple bridges, made of thin pipes and expanded steel mesh, had totally sagged and were useless. The only time I stopped was to shed a jumper, have a quick drink or to chat with Morrie and his wife Maisie as we passed. 'What some people will do for a living,' he joked. They had only reached Mount Solitary yesterday, dashed along and had a quick look this morning and were on their way home.



I went to the old hut site and set up my tent and prepared lunch. I was back for the fourth time! There was a continual drone of aircraft coming and going and there was a line of them parked on the beach when I arrived. The weather was completely calm with a high cloud cover. After a quick lunch, I marched up the beach to the area where 'Pedder Pennies' could be found. What an amazing place. I simply do not understand how they were formed. Why does the manganese iron coating only build up around the edges and not all over?

I was back at my camp by 3:00 pm, having crossed Maria Creek where the water was just below my boot tops. The sun was at such a low angle that the ruggedness of the Frankland Range was clearly shown. At that time the beach was so wide one pilot took off directly across the beach and out over the water. Dinner that evening was sausages, potatoes, peas followed by stewed apricots with boiled rice and condensed milk. Yum.

My thoughts wandered to earlier visits. One time we slept in the hut, it rained almost continuously while a noisy rainfall recorder 'clunked' every few minutes. Another time we were almost cut off by Swampy Creek, which had risen overnight. A memorable moment I recalled was with a group around a campfire in the late evening, grumbling about the imminent loss of the lake when Olegas Truchanas joined the circle. He was to die a day or so later on his voyage down the Gordon River, photographing his beloved wilderness.

That evening in the dark I could see nine campfires along the sand, and the usual campsites in the dunes were all crowded. A full moon rose over Mount Anne. Wow! Before bed I had to clear my tent of a swarm of large flying ants, while during the night a heavy mist caused large droplets to fall from the trees on to my tent, saturating it. After a breakfast of rolled oats, fruit and tea I packed my camp and moved along to the southern end of the beach. A while later I was sitting on the slopes of the Frankland Range gazing out over the lake. Sadly, water could be seen encroaching on the Serpentine River over the plains. I'm sure my eyes were wet. In overcast weather with the occasional patch of sun, the water was mirror smooth. Clouds obscured the northern ridge, where the track I have used several times over the Sentinel Range, arrives. Bird life around me was prolific. Then the sun appeared; the lake looked so serene.

To think a government decision to destroy this wonderful lake was so sad, the Premier of the day, 'Electric Eric', having bowed to pressure from the HEC. I feel they are all guilty of destroying this wonderful natural gem - a shameful act. The impoundment created by the flooding of Lake Pedder is NOT used for power generation! It is simply to elevate the waters from two rivers, the Huon and the Serpentine so their water will flow, by gravity, into Lake Gordon. The destruction of this lake was totally unnecessary.



My trip was enjoyable with a comfortable camp and good food, although sad to think that the beautiful sight before me would soon be ruined. Farewell Lake Pedder.

The walk back to my car was exhausting as the sun was fiercely hot out on the plains with no breeze. Once past Mount Solitary I settled into a rhythm, watching the scenery slowly change, as I drank frequently from my flask. The majestic Western Arthur Range kept me company. In 4 ¼ hours I dropped my pack at the car, loaded and moved back to a picnic spot on the Gordon Road, where I brewed tea and chatted to some people from New Norfolk. At Liapootah, I cooked an enormous meal at a roadside fireplace and had a good all-over wash before driving to Tarraleah, where I phoned home and my parents. Moving along the road a little further, I parked up a side track and camped. Moonlight filled the valley as I continued to eat and drink! In the morning I was entertained by currawongs playing with bits of wire and nails, trying to pull the windscreen wipers off the car and licking water droplets off the windscreen. Then it was time to drive home. I will always remember Lake Pedder.

