

# Eyes on the south east

## McGregor's Peak fire tower

Every fire tower is different but, even by that standard, McGregor's Peak fire tower is unusual. Where the main purpose of every other tower is to provide a 360-degree view of the surrounding landscape, McGregor does not sit on the very summit of the hill and overlook Tasmania horizon to horizon. Instead it rests on the shoulder, just below the summit, and looks out north, south and west. "It doesn't need to be right at the top," operator Owen explains, "with the Tasman Sea right behind us there's no need to look out that way."

Just a little further on from the tower between two peaks in the summit is the Magical Forest, a rare piece of rainforest on the south east coast of Tasmania. It is about an hour hike from the tower, but Owen can happily reassure bushwalkers when they reach him that they have already completed the hardest part: the 30 minute hike from where the boom gate stops cars seems almost vertical at times as it zig zags up the side of the mountain.

These days Owen can open the boom gate and drive a little bit further before his small car refuses to go any further and he has to hike the rest of the way on foot. It's good exercise, he says, and worth the view when you reach the top, climb the fire escape-style ladders (appropriately enough!) and look out from the hut's position just south of Murdunna to see around a third of the state.

There has been a tower at this location for probably 100 years. Owen was lucky enough to locate a newspaper article from 1937 that showed a picture of a wooden fire tower, and the woman who operated it, taken at this same location. It's incredible to think that, prior to Owen's 10-year tenure, there has been one fire tower operator after another, casting their eyes over the horizon and protecting assets and the community from imminent danger.

## Eyes on the south east, McGregor's Peak fire tower

While the system has probably modernised somewhat over the past 100 years, upon entering the hut atop the towers it is clear that this is a low-fi kind of job. In a three-meter square space, there is room for an esky, a radio, a desk and some basic (but invaluable monitoring equipment).

“Really we don’t need much more than binoculars, the compass, this room in a tower and the human eye: which is the most important part because the human eye is still the best we have for distinguishing between cloud, dust and smoke – nothing technological comes quite as close.”



Image: McGregor's Peak Fire Tower, looking across Eaglehawk Neck, Tasman Peninsula





## Eyes on the south east, McGregor's Peak fire tower



Image: Fire tower operator Owen Smith, at McGregor's Peak fire tower.

