

# Tower Hill

“Just a box on some rocks”

Described with that inimitable sense of countrified understatement by fellow Snow Hill tower operator Boof, the last thing you might think when you look at Tower Hill fire tower, perched on the triangular outcrop, is that's it's just a box on some rocks. It does however fit the description: it's not much more than a three meter square box with the fire tower-typical four sides of balcony and walkway, and it sits upon a protrusion of rocks that appear to have been thrust from the earth in some prehistoric age!

Views in each direction take in the towers on top of Mount Wellington in the south and the peak of Flinders Island in the north. At the risk of over-dramatising Tower Hill fire tower, it truly is a dramatic site.

It is reached by gingerly climbing 280 steps that have been variously cemented, cut or attached to the sometimes almost vertical rising rocks, and climbing up is a breathtaking experience – in more ways than one. Especially at the start of the season, says Tower Hill operator Bob. “At the beginning it takes me a while to climb the steps as I take a rest pretty regularly on the way up. I've learned how to get up without raising a sweat and I really take my time. By the end of the season, it takes half the time. Especially if it's been a busy season.”

Tower Hill sits 1km above Fingal and has the highest elevation of any tower in Tasmania. That height does funny things to the weather: it's a good 10 degrees cooler than it is down in Fingal. Sometimes it's engulfed in cloud, and sometimes it sits above cloud that spreads out below. The most worrisome weather phenomena are the wind and lightning, Bob says.

“We have recorded 160km winds here. I have been up here in 120km winds and let me tell you, at that time I wished I was at home with my mum!”

And the lightning. Bob says when a cloud comes over Ben Lomond and it starts to eddy, then you know things might get a bit scary. And then black spiders start crawling around the inside of the hut

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walls and you know the lightning is about to start. “As soon as you see the spiders you start looking around, waiting.”

The hut has taken a direct hit in the past. It melted all the wires and cables, but the design of the hut conducts the lightning down the walls so the operators know they just need to sit on the floor and wait it out.

The tower has seen its share of dramatic events too: from the unfortunate passing due to heart attack of one of its operators out on the balcony to playing a key role in Fingal fire, this tower, like all of them, has plenty of stories to tell.



Image: Tower Hill Fire Tower, looking from Fingal



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Image: Fire tower operator Bob Oates, at Tower Hill fire tower.



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