

The two forests of Hollybank

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Sometimes, Tasmania's forest scenery and history is best appreciated at the slow walking pace of your natural-stride human body. And at other times, it's best appreciated as fast as gravity can zip you along. At Hollybank Forest Reserve, just east of Launceston, you can experience both.

When you'd like to stroll and experience a colourful scene, the forests of Hollybank are as pleasant as they come. There's a bright emerald green that comes from the deciduous forests of the Northern Hemisphere – our eucalyptus leaves are too yellow and our rainforests are a bit too shaded. By contrast, the leaves of European ash trees shine brightly for a single season before dropping in autumn. These trees thrive in the British Isles and survive even farther north in the harsh Norwegian winters. As it turns out, ash tree wood makes excellent handles for sporting equipment, and as such there's an 80-year-old plantation growing at Hollybank.

Fortunately for us today, it was a commercial failure, and the forest is now an outdoor destination unlike anywhere else in Tasmania. In summertime, your eyes can soak in the bright jade leaves. If you return a few months later, you can experience a stunning autumn display as the leaves transform into vibrant colours. Walk slowly, and you can best appreciate subtle varieties of yellows and reds.

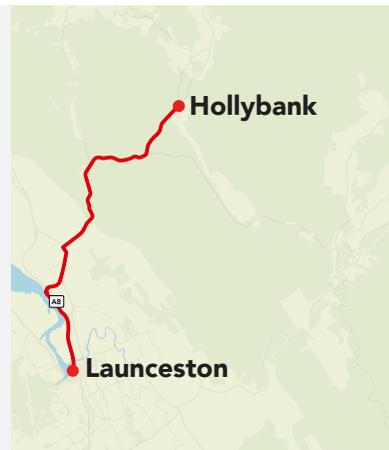
There's another, deeper green section to Hollybank – the cool and fragrant cedar, cypress, and pine forests. Walking trails lead out of the ash trees to nearby groves of Californian redwoods and Oregonian Douglas-firs. Their furrowed, brown bark contrasts strongly with their fine needle leaves. These massive evergreen trees are virtually the only rivals to Tasmanian trees for height, and as the years go by they will continue their race towards the sky.

Hollybank is also home to native tall gum forests, and strung between their straight stems is a remarkable sequence of steel cables. You can zip along them on a canopy tour run by Treetops Adventures, and while the traverses are marvellously quick, there are Cloud Stations that offer a moment's pause.

You begin the canopy tour at ground level – the route takes advantage of the steep hillside towards Pipers River. Your guides will have kitted you out in helmet and safety harness, and assigned you a massive pulley to speed along the lines. This critical piece of equipment is cleverly designed so that once it is threaded onto the

Getting there:

From Launceston, head 5km north on A8 along the East Bank of the Tamar towards Newnham. At the University, take George Town Road for 3km to a right turn on Lilydale Rd. Hollybank is well-signed 12km further on the right. Shuttle buses to the ziplines can be arranged via Treetops Adventures.



cable at the first Cloud Station, it can't be removed except at the other end. And to get there, you'll have to step out into space and fly across to the next station.

Like other ziplines, Treetops Adventure offers a balanced mix of ease and adrenaline. Exiting off of the Cloud Station is as simple as lifting your feet and stepping into space, but there's no denying the surge of excitement. The harness and wires are, of course, engineered for safety, but our brains aren't engineered for flying.

Wrapping like Saturn's rings around the stem of a Eucalyptus tree, the stations are built of solid steel components and sturdy netting. From this remarkable vantage point, you can look out at the branches of the mature forest and down across the river gorge.

The river itself is the highlight of the zipline tour: the final cable spans stretch hundreds of metres across and then parallel to the waters. During a recent wintertime visit, it was crashing along with churning foam and misting spray; a chaotic contrast to the precise line strung through space.

Returning to Earth at the tour's end is a curious return to gravity. Off of the cable, you are reminded of the mass of the steel pulley, and your legs need to relearn the art of walking. After experiencing the treetops at such an unnaturally high speed, it's a delight to move at the pace of the human body.