

AUSSIE EIGHT COMPLETERS

On July 8, 2016, **Eric Hodge** and **Nigel Roberts** became the first Highpointers Club members to climb all eight Australian state and territory highpoints

In 2003, *Wild* – an Australian outdoor adventure magazine that covers activities such as hiking, back-country skiing, and kayaking – featured **Nick & Ben Gough**, a father and son team that had climbed the highest peak in each of Australia's 6 states and 2 territories.

We came across the Goughs' article five years after it was published. At the time, we were tackling the highpoints of ten of the western states of the USA, a task that saw us fly across the Pacific from Australia (where Eric lives) and New Zealand (which is Nigel's home) to the United States on five separate occasions.

Not content with spending a small fortune trying to achieve our US highpointing goals, neither of us could resist rising to the challenge of trying to climb what have been dubbed the "Aussie Eight."

Not every Apex to Zenith reader may appreciate just how big Australia is. The area of the contiguous 48 states of the US is just under 3.12 million square miles. Australia is very nearly the same size; it's 2.97 million square miles. As you can see, a map of Australia covers very nearly all the lower 48 states. Using numbered green triangles, the map also shows the approximate location of the eight Australian highpoints and the order in which we climbed them.

In order to achieve our goal of the Aussie Eight, we again went on five separate expeditions that involved thousands of miles of travel by plane and by car (and, of course, once again spending a small fortune!).

We began our quest in February 2009 by climbing Mt Ossa (which is 5,305 feet above sea-level). Situated in the middle of the island state of Tasmania, several hundred people climb Mt Ossa every year – but the vast bulk do so as a short detour while hiking the Overland Track, the state's world-renowned five-day



The USA overlaid with the outline of Australia.

Note the triangles which represent the relative location of the Aussie Eight - from Ontario to the Gulf, and Oregon to Georgia.

trek through the Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park. For our part, though, we teamed up with **Ralph Baulis**, a friend from Tasmania we'd first met in 1991 on a gloriously unsuccessful climbing trip to the Himalayas, and the three of us decided to "do" Mt Ossa in a single day. Not surprisingly, therefore, climbing Mt Ossa was our longest day: it took us 13 hours and 20 minutes. Nevertheless, Mt Ossa set the scene for our entire Aussie Eight undertaking: on all eight peaks we were blessed by good weather and we were always successful on our first attempt.

In early January 2010, we went on a four-day road trip from Canberra (Australia's federal capital) to Melbourne (the capital of the state of Victoria), and climbed another three highpoints. First we tackled Bimberri Peak, which is in the Australian Capital Territory, Australia's equivalent of the District of Columbia, but unlike Point Reno (DC's highpoint), Bimberri is

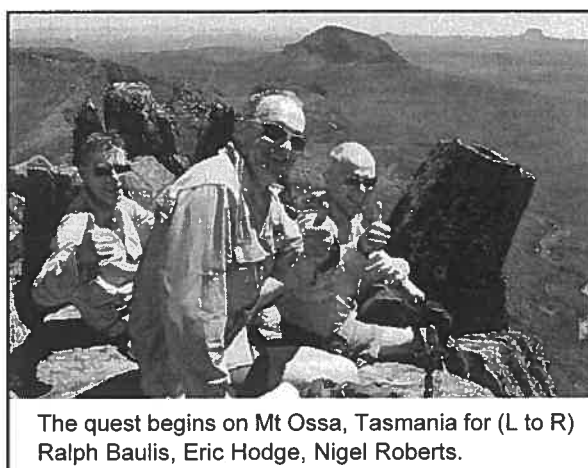
6,276 feet above sea-level, and climbing the peak took 8 hours and 10 minutes and required some serious scrub-bashing to reach the summit.

The following day we climbed Mt Kosciuszko (7,309 feet), which is not only the highest mountain in New South Wales but is also the highest mountain in Australia. It was an extremely pleasant hike through fields of wild flowers.

Two days later – again in perfect conditions – we summited Mt Bogong (6,515 feet), the highest peak in Victoria. In just eleven months we had done half the Aussie Eight. Little did we realize it would take us another six-and-a-half years to complete our quest.

In August 2011, we met in Cairns, the largest city in the tropical far north of Queensland, and two days later we summited Mt Bartle Frere (5,321 feet). It was undoubtedly the hardest of the eight Australian highpoints: ten-and-a-half hours battling the heat, humidity, and (worst of all) blood-sucking leeches in a tropical rain forest certainly made for a tough but memorable day.

So far, the five mountains we'd scaled had all been reasonably accessible; not so the remaining three. The highest mountain in South Australia, Mt Woodroffe (4,708 feet), is on aboriginal land that is "closed to the general public." An entry permit is required to gain access to the peak. As a result, we joined an officially-sanctioned trip to the mountain and in



The quest begins on Mt Ossa, Tasmania for (L to R) Ralph Baulis, Eric Hodge, Nigel Roberts.

May 2013 found ourselves in the company of 25 other Australian highpointers, who had all joined the expedition for exactly the same reason we did – namely, to gain access to the peak! In the dry desert air of central Australia, leeches weren't a problem. Instead, though, we had to fight our way through fields of spinifex with sharp spiky silica leaves that constantly pierced our gaiters and multiple layers of clothing. After the climb, our legs looked like blood-spotted pin-cushions.

Highpoint number seven was Mt Zeil (5,023 feet) in the Northern Territory. After climbing Mt Woodroffe, we drove to north to Alice Springs where we rented a large four-wheel drive vehicle with space for extra tires, water and gas, and set off on a two-day Australian outback expedition. The spinifex on Mt Zeil had been drastically reduced by bush fires the previous year, and – as a result – our ten-and-a-quarter hour day on Mt Zeil was far more enjoyable than our eight-and-a-quarter hour day had been on Mt Woodroffe six days earlier.

Three years later, we returned to the remote outback in order to climb Western Australia's Mt Meharry. At 4,094 feet above sea-level, it's the lowest of the eight Aussie highpoints. It's also, by far and away, the easiest to climb. The whole climb – including 45 minutes on the summit – took us only a little over four hours, but that did not deter us from celebrating our success with a champagne toast on the top.

Our quest was over. We'd enjoyed it immensely. By climbing the eight Australian highpoints we have been to and seen parts of the continent we'd never otherwise have visited. It was a thoroughly worthwhile and satisfying experience. We recommend it without hesitation to other members of the Highpointers Club.

[Ed. Note - Readers may wish to refresh their knowledge of Canada's 13 highpoints

All discoveries happen from
"I Don't Know"

- Kyle Maynard

Toasting success are Nigel Roberts (left) and Eric Hodge on July 8, 2016, after a 7.5 year quest to climb the highest point of Australia's 8 states & territories.

"WA" is an abbreviation for Western Australia, which is the largest state in terms of area. The highpoint of Australia's WA is 10,000 feet lower than the highpoint of USA's WA



Ten Summits for First-Time Mountaineering

If you are new to climbing big mountains, then you might be interested to know that **Jared Kennedy** (OutdoorProject.com 2-23-16) created list of 10 summits which are ideal for a first-time mountaineering experience where you can test your skills. Obviously, mountaineering can be dangerous whether beginning, advanced, or expert. Some of these peaks require knowledge of ice axe and crampons, while others do not. All require some higher level of fitness. So get fit and go test yourself, and remember you can always turn back if you feel uncomfortable.

1) **Mt St. Helens** - Dramatic hike in late summer when there's no snow, otherwise ice axe & crampons may be required.

2) **South Sister** - Long hike exposed to the weather.

3) **Mt Adams** - Long hike of 6500' often requires ice axe & crampons, often done as a two-day overnight, ideal for gaining experience.

4) **Mt Shasta** - Overnight hike to ascend this Fourteener with ice axe and crampons.

5) **Mt Hood** - Second most climbed glaciated mountain in the world but not to be taken lightly. Usually climbed with rope, ice axe, and crampons. By using Timberline Mountain Guides, inexperienced climbers can safely take an important step to improve their KSE (knowledge, skill, experience).

6) **Mt Whitney** - Most take the 22 mile trail up from Whitney Portal, usually with an overnight.

7) **Golden Ears** - This non-technical boulder scramble is west of Vancouver.

8) **Middle Sister** - Test your off-trail travel abilities. Snow travel is possible even in late August so bring ice axe & crampons. The summit is gained by an unstable rocky slope.

9) **Borah Peak** - Short and steep with a nice test in the middle - a rock rib scramble known as Chicken Out Ridge. Many years there is snow stretch which requires ice axe & crampons

10) **Mt McLoughlin** - Southern Oregon hosts this peak with a non-technical (in late summer) trail over large rocks.

Read more at <http://www.outdoorproject.com/blog-news/10-ideal-summits-first-time-mountaineering>. Thank you David Olson for spotting this. Are there peaks in the east which offer similar first-time mountaineering tests?