

## North East Tasmania – an Odyssey

### Part 1 On the Hume Highway from Hell

When we finally pulled out of our driveway, the car and camper trailer in tow, loaded to the hilt, tinny on top, destination Tasmania, for me it was with a feeling of relief rather than the normal excited, holiday feeling of expectation. It seemed to have been a long time in the coming and whilst I'm sure some people would say of our lives in the past year or two, "you guys are always on holidays", we hadn't done much since our last trip to the Sandy Cape Lighthouse in November last year.

I would like to have been setting off a month earlier to catch some warmer weather than I'm sure we would get on this trip, but Von had her Quilt Camp on in early March, an annual pilgrimage made by she and her mates to their Mecca at Meroo. Unlike the pilgrimages of their religious counterparts however, the "Sew and Sews" apart from fabrics and threads, irons and ironing boards, sewing machines and all other sorts of stuff I don't know about, go armed with an esky full of decadent treats and enough booze to lay out a battalion of marines for a fortnight. The girls are away for a mere three days but don't bring much of the decadence or booze home.

Another thing determining our holiday time was that I elected to stay around to do some Executive Officer work for the Western Sydney Industry Awards again this year, a job that put a few shekels in the bank which, given I haven't been doing much work lately, were well received.

Part of the feeling of relief too, was just to be getting out of our environment where for the past couple of months I was stressing out over the economic turmoil that has seen a very large chunk of our superannuation fly off into cyber space, at least temporarily, along with some of the dreams and schemes I had for our future lives. I feel like having a rant about the inadequacies of so called financial advisers who are really nothing of the sort and only feed you 'the company line', claiming credit in the good times and going very quiet in the bad, but I won't (or maybe I just did), so suffice it to say that once again in my life I've re-learned a (very very very expensive) lesson, that at the end of the day we are the masters of our own destiny and need to have the balls to make our own judgment calls.

Enough of this. I was feeling better even as we drove out of our street and headed south on the first leg of the trip to Melbourne. On our previous escapades to Tassie, we have sailed overnight on the ferry but this trip was to be a day sailing so a few things had to be done differently.

We had hoped to stay overnight with Valerie and Peter at Yakandandah as we did last time, but leaving early around four am to get to Melbourne in time for the day sailing. This plan didn't work out though as Val was taking the kids north to Nowra for the school holidays, so I had identified what looked like a good overnight rest area some sixty kilometers north of Melbourne and for the first time we would try a single night

stop, just flipping the camper open, no annexe, use sleeping bags and be able to quickly pack it up again the morning.

About halfway there I asked Von to program the map co-ordinates for the rest stop into our new Karen, no, damn it, Carmen the Garmin (friends of ours have already named their Garmin GPS Carmen, but I can't think of another name that rhymes so I'm just going to have to steal it). Anyway, with Karen (the voice) beginning to give us directions I proudly proclaimed to Von what a useful bit of equipment it was and how being able to load co-ordinates would get us to all sorts of off the beaten track places with no hassles. Will I ever learn caution.

Things started to go wrong about fifty kms before the rest stop when Karen instructed us to leave the Hume Hwy in favour of some minor road leading to some minor town, neither of which seemed to have anything to do with where we wanted to go. "Recalculating". Karen is very efficient and within seconds of her charges, in this case us, not acting according to her instructions, she recalculates and gives new directions. We tried to help by giving her new parameters to navigate by, 'fastest' rather than 'shortest' and re-entered the co-ordinates but Karen kept insisting we leave the highway, so we kept ignoring her.

Maybe we had been focusing too much on Carmen the Garmin rather than the road, because it became obvious we had past the rest stop and were getting close to Melbourne's outskirts. This was not good as there would be nowhere to camp closer in. Karen was telling us to make a U turn, so we did, taking a side road on her instructions and beginning the 20 or so kms journey back to where we should have been.

Karen doesn't have the capacity to rationalise. We had punched in co-ordinates that were not actually 'on a road' but off to the side of a road, not just any road mind you but the busiest road in Australia, the Hume Highway between Sydney and Melbourne. Karen's logic was, 'boy if you want to go off road, I'll take you off road alright and she promptly directed us into a private housing estate on a road that assumedly finished some where close to our destination, but on the wrong side of the dual carriageway and with just a couple of paddocks in between!

Eventually, my human navigator got us back across country to the highway and we again headed toward Melbourne and our overnight stopping place that Camps Australia advised me was suitable for big rigs, had toilets and barbeques and shady trees and telephone reception and, and, and. We found it a few minutes down the road and it did indeed have a big sign that we'd missed first time around – "CLOSED". Bum. We knew there was another truck pull off a short distance further on, so headed for it and, with no toilets or any of the other 'features' of our planned resting place and very close to the road, we flipped open the camper and tried to make ourselves comfy for the night.

I suppose I got some sleep, but not very much. I should have taken Von's advice and used earplugs. The traffic noise was unbelievable. All night, on and on and on and on, truck after truck, engine brakes, B-doubles pulling up along side us so the driver could have a leak then keep going, an incredible amount of nocturnal activity. But, the exercise did prove that we can overnight quite successfully without too much setting up hassle but it was also a lesson learned – don't do it close to a major traffic route.



Sleepless in Victoria by the Hume Highway traffic from Hell



The 'Spirits' pass in Bass Strait

The daytime ferry ride to Tassie was, if boring, wonderfully smooth which meant the Kwells we took for sea sickness had nothing to do before dissipating in our systems, something we are not sorry about. The highlight of the trip being passing the other Spirit of Tasmania making the journey back from Devonport to Melbourne. Our good fortune continued once the ferry docked as we were one of the first vehicles off and checked through customs, a rare event for us, having been

almost last on several occasions.

## **Part 2 You can't wear an Akubra to bed.**

At a nearby caravan park in Devonport we managed to get most of the camp set up before it was really dark, enjoyed a fantastically tasty dinner of bacon, eggs and baked beans then mercifully crashed into our lovely bed for the best night's sleep I've had in a long time. Having said that, our first two nights in the camper at this time of year have been cool to say the least and noticeably the bits that stick out of bed, ears nose and face were quite cold so I determined to do something about that as most of our body heat is lost through our heads and I figured you can't wear an Akubra to bed.

After a quick drive past our house at Ulverstone to see how much work there was to do, we visited the Penguin Market on Sunday and whilst Von meandered around the stalls, I wandered back down the road to the St. Vincent de Paul's shop and bought us each a beanie to wear in the cold and in bed. It mightn't be a romantic good look, but at least we were warm during the evening and in bed.

The Devonport weather buffeted us with strong, cold, gusty winds that brought plenty of showers through the night but fortunately Monday was dry and we spent the day working in the garden at Ulverstone doing our annual prune and inspecting the property with our Real Estate agent. All is well there and having organised the agent's handy man to do some more serious pruning of taller trees that were beyond my capabilities and to take away our cuttings, we were ready to head off to the north east for the 'exploration of the wild' part of our trip.

### **Part 3 Smashed, bashed and beaten up.**

We made our way south east to skirt around Launceston before heading north and to the coast and again, ignoring Karen's pleadings to leave the Tasman Highway in favour of lesser roads. She definitely doesn't like major roads this girl. Passing through Scottsdale and Derby we came to the tiny hamlet of Gladstone, a hub to the various roads that radiate like wheel spokes to different remote areas of the coast. Here we decided to head further east than I had originally planned and check out camp sites at Musselroe Bay in and adjacent to the Mount William National Park.

These camp places didn't excite us as whilst the nearby beaches were pretty, they couldn't be seen from the sites we looked at and the National Park fees would have made them quite expensive. Backtracking we made our way further north to Petal Point on the far north east coast at Boobyalla Beach finding a lovely place to camp with ocean views and easy access to the beach.

As with most sites that come with "views", they do come with a built in downside – exposure to the wind and elements, something we found out first hand on the Fraser Island ocean beach in 2006 and Petal Point was no different but, we felt confident in our ability to cope with the conditions. It was windy as we set up camp but once inside with the annexe all zipped up it was warm and we felt safe and not threatened by the wind that had the canvas and tarp flapping excitedly and loudly.

Despite the noise of all the flapping about, we both had a good night and awoke to a pleasant morning that saw us take a long walk along the beach to distant rocks. It reminded me afterwards of being a kid when your parents have taken you on a rare visit to the seaside. Once on that beach all that matters is searching out some treasures to prolong the memory afterwards, a cuttle fish, a coloured shell, a piece of weathered, bleached, white drift wood.

On the way back we discovered the toilets. Not such a significant event one would think but being well secluded in the bush, they were not apparent from the roadway and

someone had taken down the sign, probably for firewood. Exploring our discovery, Von learned from a poster on the wall that this place is in fact a world renowned bird sanctuary with birds from China and Siberia visiting regularly.



Boobyalla Rock Seal – well, you have to have some imagination

In the afternoon, anticipating we would take a shower at some stage, we erected Sir Thomas Crapper, the trusty shower and toilet tent but, less than a couple of hours later, we abandoned that idea and battled the now very significant wind to dismantle the little tent rather than have it swept away or ripped apart. What we didn't know, not having had the radio on, was that a deep depression was moving across the area bringing hurricane status

winds of up to 175kms per hour and this was just the start of it.

The couple in a motor home parked nearby moved off and the fellow driving seemed to indicate “going down” with his hand as he went by, but he didn't say anything and I presumed he just meant they were moving position to somewhere closer to the beach. In hindsight, he may have been indicating he was going down to a sheltered spot because of the weather forecast – it would have been nice if he'd said something.

As it was, the weather got progressively more violent and throughout the evening the whole camper and annexe was bombarded with wind gusts unlike any we ever experienced before, even including our famous Fraser Island episode. I was beginning to get worried as we sat holding on to the annexe poles to keep them from being knocked over by the wildly flapping canvas and with our chairs on the skirts of the annexe canvas, trying in vain to keep the walls from blowing in or out as the wind gusted from the north and west.

It didn't get any better and we were smashed, bashed and beaten up as the evening turned into night. First the tent pegs holding down the annexe walls gave up, some being catapulted away by the whip lash of the flailing canvas. Guy ropes started to come loose then our tarp ripped off all its securings on the back side of the camper, flew across the camper and became permanently airborne like a great silver sail on the annexe side.



A breezy but benign Boobyalla Beach from our camp site at Petal Point before the winds from Hell arrived

I was very worried about the ability of the camper structure to take this battering and relocated one support on the windward side where the whole structure was bending and flexing to a most disturbing level. This worked for a while but the pressure of the wind on all the annexe canvas was huge and it was acting like a massive sail, billowing in towards us, with most of the guy ropes obviously loose or ripped out. The noise was incredible and Von and I hardly spoke during all this as we would have had to shout, but just exchanged worried smiles from time to time and yelled to each other when the next bit of rescue work had to be done.

About 4am I wasn't sure the camper would survive anymore so made what was a drastic decision to take the load off by trying to take down the annexe. Working strategies through in my mind earlier, this was the last thing I wanted to do as I figured it could end in a disastrous amount of damage, but now in the worsening conditions I thought it was the only thing we could do to save the trailer structure. Everything in the annexe except the Engel fridge and gas bottle was moved into the camper, then we managed to get the walls down, but not before the support strut I'd adjusted in the camper finally buckled under the load.

Von was left trying to keep that end of the camper from caving in whilst I straightened the strut as best I could and repositioned it, supporting the area that had bent. Eventually all the gear and the annexe walls were in the camper and the move had indeed lightened the load, but the wind became even more ferocious and it was not long before the annexe roof, which I had thought would be OK, was torn off by the wind with one rapid unzipping motion along its length so it, with the tarp still attached, ended up in the bushes nearby, luckily with one or two guy ropes still attached so they didn't fly away completely.

We spent the rest of the night being bashed around in the camper, hanging on to the support stay at the windward end. Von did get an hour or two's sleep as she was exhausted and despite my best efforts not to, I also fell asleep for about half an hour just before dawn. The insipid, grey, cloud filtered light of dawn brought no respite from the raging winds but allowed us to see what looked like a war zone outside, canvas and tarp mangled in the bushes, twisted knotted guy ropes lying everywhere, tent pegs strewn around and a broken flouro tube from our annexe light.

#### Part 4 Comfort at Cosy Corner.

There was no decision to be made whether we would go or stay and in the next couple of hours we made some semblance of order from the chaotic mess, loaded the trailer and car and managed to fold everything up remarkably well given the gale that still raged around us. We made our way to St. Helens where we booked into a lovely unit for a night which enabled us to clean up, feel a little more relaxed and regroup, organise repairs to tent poles and a few other relatively minor things that had happened to our equipment during the big blast and generally get ourselves back together.



Sunrise over the Bay of Fires. It's easy to see how it got its name

We discovered during the day that last night's winds had been state wide and at their worst, in the south, had reached hurricane speeds of 176kms per hour, wreaking havoc and damage worth millions of dollars. Trust us to be camped in an exposed spot when a hurricane comes through, but, on the other hand, we were lucky not to be in an exposed spot around Hobart where we would have suffered much

worse damage for sure.

On the next morning, Friday, we made our way to the next planned stop at the Bay of Fires just a few kilometers north of St. Helens and found a magnificent camp site at Cosy Corner No.2, the location co-ordinates for anyone interested is S 41 13.333, E 148 16.946. We were right at the end of a series of sites, back from the water so had some shelter should it be needed, yet were only meters from



This Bay of Fires Salmon gave us two good meals



Lichen covered rocks at Cosy Corner, Bay of Fires

a magnificent beach and ocean on a warm, sunny day – it was great. There were in fact lots of good sites virtually all the way up the Garden’s Road at the 5 designated camping areas, all of which are free stay for up to a month.

Setting up the camper again in calm conditions it became apparent that the canvas had in fact suffered at petulant Petal Point, with several areas almost rubbed through and a couple of small holes, but nothing serious so for the time being, seam sealer

and gaffer tape fixed the problem until we get a canvas repair kit.

Our time at the Bay of Fires was great and we relaxed after the trauma of Petal Point with walks on the beaches, excursions to The Gardens, Ansons Point, Eddystone Point Lighthouse, St. Columba Falls, Ralph Falls and Binalong Bay. I also got in a little fishing off the beach and although not much was being caught, luck was on my side one day and I landed a lovely salmon that gave us two substantial dinners. The fish gave me a great fight and obviously not wanting to give in until the last, after I had dispensed of its head and tail, it still managed to do a nerval dance of death, violently rustling the plastic shopping bag where it lay, somewhat ingloriously, in safe keeping from the ever hungry, hovering gulls and ready for me to carry triumphantly back to camp.

On our last day at Cosy Corner we finished doing our repair jobs to the tarp, and hopefully have salvaged it, at least for the rest of this trip. We really enjoyed our time at Bay of Fires and will happily return there in the future.

### **Part 5 Rain Forest and River Esk trout.**

We decided to have a change of scenery and leave the coast for a while in favour of a river bank. So, on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> we heading south and west, making our way to Griffin camp ground on the South Esk





A lovely little South Esk River brown trout

River, once more with hopes of enticing a juicy trout or two to commit suicide for us. Armed with the co-ordinates for this site from the Camps Australia Book, Carmen the Garmin took us in the right general direction, but nearing the camp, wanted to take us in a different direction to the signs. We followed the signs and arrived at the large camping area, (with different co-ordinates to those in the book) which was completely deserted, giving us the pick of the sites. We chose a flat area on the river bank

protected by trees, close to a fire place and with a picnic table. What we did notice was that this seemed to be a very well used area and signs further up the road indicated it is used by trail bike riders so we anticipated that Friday night could see an invasion by bike riding hoons.

Our time at Griffin was very pleasant with evenings spent sitting by a camp fire whilst the possums fossicked in the nearby garbage bin for tit bits. I did manage to catch some small(ish) brown trout from the lovely South Esk River but not, I must admit, by fly fishing. No, these guys were much more interested in a little spinning Celta as I waded up stream casting into the shallow waters.

Trying to be confident I would be successful, I'd put a plastic shopping bag in my pocket for a catch whilst I carried on fishing and when the first lovely spotted trout did commit suicide, into the bag he went. Now, what to do with the bag? I decided that for safe keeping it would be best hanging inside my waders so at least if the little blighter did manage to somehow escape, it would be down my leg and not back into the river. So I carefully secured one shoulder strap of the waders through the handles of the bag and let it hang inside the front of the waders.

The fish must have been miffed at this treatment and just as I was about to cast again, it decided to seek revenge and started thrashing around in the bag, giving me a severe whack in the cods in the process. It may only have been a little fish, but it packed quite a punch and I quickly shifted it to a less dangerous place.

The area is a working forest and we explored Mathinna Falls and Evercreech Forest Reserve where there was a wonderful rain forest walk, not dissimilar to that at Arthur River on the west coast, but Evercreech was home to the most magnificent White Gums, massive straight trees with the tallest reaching ninety one meters.

## Part 6 Stingrays and Pussy cats at Moulting Lagoon

We decided not to wait and see if the hoons would arrive on Friday night, electing instead to pack up in the morning and move on to our next stopping point at the River and Rocks campground near Coles Bay and Freycinet. On the way we visited the Elephant's Pass Pancake restaurant for a little lunchtime decadence. All in all we had a good food day on the Friday as, although having hooked and lost as many more, I'd managed to catch four trout in the South Esk that were big enough to keep and we smoked these for a delightful dinner at our new River and Rocks camp.

Our time in the Freycinet area was delightful. The camp was good and we enjoyed evenings by a camp fire, although rain did try to dampen our enthusiasm one night. We were also able to launch our boat into Moulting Lagoon, a very pretty waterway with views through to The Hazards. Not only did we have a good time pottering around in the boat, but we caught bream, flathead and a leather jacket that gave us several meals as a bonus. About ten years ago, Yvonne bought Dale some soft plastic lures, which was about the same time he lost interest in fishing, so they had remained pristine in their container until now when Von suggested we bring them on this trip.



Yvonne made it to the Wine Glass Bay lookout in Freycinet National Park

I've heard lots about these lures but never tried them and to be honest, was a skeptic. Now I'm a convert! As soon as we tried one it got bitten off, then bingo, we began catching flathead on them, convincing me to spend more time understanding how best to fish with them. Ultimately though, on this trip the fish won

as far as plastics were concerned as they were much better at chewing them off the hook than I was at being able to catch them. Still on the fishing theme, on our last day at River and Rocks I hooked a large stingray on light tackle and had a hard time (and lots of fun) playing it for about twenty minutes until I got it to the boat, gave it a pat for luck and freed it from the hook without any damage. I'm sure there was a message for me in the defiant flick of its stinging tail though as it flapped its wings and gracefully descended to the safety of the lagoon's sandy bottom.

On one glorious sunny day we also made the trek up the steep walk to the Wine Glass Bay lookout in Freycinet National Park, another great achievement for Von, rewarded by the magnificent spectacle of a Tasmanian and Australian iconic view. We were intending to then walk to the beach in the bay, but about a third of the way there decided that Von would almost certainly be struggling with her legs on the way back, so aborted that idea and went fishing instead.

During the last night of our stay at River and Rocks I woke to what I realised were animal sounds very close to my ear. Fortunately the animal, which I soon realised was a possum, was on the other side of the canvas, but very close nonetheless. It started scratching at the canvas so I whacked at it from my side which sent it into something of a frenzy that had it jumping up and down on the trailer's tool box, grunting and snorting. Then, just to annoy me I'm sure, it clambered on top of the camper and stomped around up there on the tarp like a flat footed bobby on the beat for several minutes, then slid down past my head again before leaping onto the tool box. I'd left the lid unlocked, so the possum was bouncing up and down on it like a trampoline making one hell of a din. Eventually it decided it had had enough of our 'playground' and left us in peace, not that Von was bothered, she had slept right through all the commotion and thought it hilarious when I told her the story next morning.

Yvonne had her own four legged visitor story though, as the previous night, hearing a noise in the annexe, she had quietly got up, found a torch and gone to investigate. What she found was that a tiny cat, kitten size but with mature features, brown with spots and an extremely short tail, had found its way in and was trying to get at the remains of our fish meal in the garbage bag. The cat ran off when I called out to see what was happening, but we fleetingly saw it again in the bush the next day, strange.

### **Part 7 Lake "leech" Leake and the Trout Drought.**



The dead, flooded, Lake Leake forest re-emerges as water levels drop

Lake Leake is a picturesque place and just an hour's drive from Freycinet. Being the only ones there when we arrived just before midday, we were able to get the best camping spot with power, close to the amenities and with a good view of the lake. The water was well down compared to when we were last there two years earlier and more of the dead, statue like remnants of the flooded forest were

evident.

I went for a reconnoiter in the boat during the afternoon and was wearing waders to avoid getting wet launching and handling the boat. On my return, as I took the waders off, Von said ‘what on earth have you done to yourself’ pointing at a blood covered left leg. Well, I had no idea, but both I and the inside of the waders were covered in blood. Further investigation of the waders revealed a very fat and full leach that had obviously been feasting on me for some time.

Once again it would seem I was not destined to catch trout at Lake Leake and the trout drought continued. All I managed to catch during several outings in the boat was a lot of weed and a few Redfin (English Perch). Being a pest that had to be destroyed anyway and as Von hadn’t seen this species, I took half a dozen of the small critters back to camp in the landing net to show her. With darkness upon us and wanting to get clean and warm for dinner, I put the net, complete with its contents outside the annexe intending to dispose of the fish in the morning and thought no more of it. That is until in the middle of the night, when the unmistakable sound of the aluminium net handle being dragged along the gravel road woke me.

Something had decided the fish would make a good meal and had taken off with them my net and all. I thought about getting up to try and salvage the situation, but for just a moment mind you, quickly deciding it was too dark and too cold to go hunting for the fish thief in the middle of the night. I resolved to sort it out in the morning, pulling my beanie on a little tighter and snuggling back down under the blankets.

The next morning after ten minutes of searching I did track down the net, wedged in the entrance to a “Devil’s cave” about thirty meters away from our camp. I had been sure the net would be ripped to shreds, but amazingly it was intact. Four of the fish had been pulled through the mesh and two other bigger ones were still tangled up. The little Tassie Devils must be strong though, as the



Reminder of another time, a timber boat, its hay day long gone

aluminium handle was bent and cracked through the middle where they had tried to force the whole thing into their lair. I left them the two other fish as a bonus for a good effort and giving us a good laugh, then set about repairing the net handle.

I also made a very bad mistake at Lake Leake, deciding to take “Karen” in the boat to mark a path through the sunken timbers so that if returning after dark, I could retrace the ‘bread crumb’ route and so avoid sinking the tinny. All went well of the first trip and Karen performed to perfection. The second time I however was very different and as I was loading the boat, Karen fell from my pocket into the water. I’m sure I went deathly white as I saw \$700 go down the drain (or, more accurately, down the lake). My worst fears were realised when after retrieving the expensive little gadget, I could see water on the inside of the screen.

Panic. These things are not meant to be taken apart by their owners and I had no way of getting the tiny star headed screws out of the frame to attempt to dry things. Putting the gas radiator on in the camper, I hoped the warmth would help rid the GPS of water and by day’s end, despite the screen looking somewhat worse for wear and definitely not new any more, Karen was working again albeit with plenty of condensation on the inside of the screen which is not good but, apparently without major trauma, much to my relief. Whether or not this lasts or the near drowning experience will give her brain damage and shorten her life span, remains to be seen.

Despite the GPS incident, we thoroughly enjoyed our relaxed Lake Leake stay which gave us the chance to catch up on things, like Von giving me a much needed haircut and doing the washing and it was whilst we were immersed in this task that we first saw Scar Face. Scar Face was a small grey kangaroo who had through some mishap, lost her left eye and had a large white scar running down her forehead to her nose. She appeared from the bush behind us and, unafraid, loped on past at a canter, only a few meters away, to stop and graze on the grass in front of the barbeque area.

There was in fact lots of wildlife here, Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos, Rosellas, Scarlet Robins, Kookaburras and many more birds on shore, besides the black swans and other water fowl on the lake. Possums roamed at night crashing about in the garbage bins looking for anything tasty someone might have left there and I’ve already mentioned the little ‘devils’. On one crisp, cold morning, which the caretaker later told us was just 0.7 deg C, I was up just before sunrise and, rugged up in several jumpers, a jacket and the now ever present beanie, spent some time watching the thick white mist over the lake that made ghostly figures from the sunken trees. Coming back from taking photos of this I saw a lone deer fifty meters down the road, cautiously grazing but ever vigilant and she had seen me long before I’d spotted her.

Our last experience with wild life at Lake Leake was in the nearby Chalet where we went to see what fishing gear they had as I was looking for a particular spinner for Woods Lake. Entry to the Chalet was through a bar area and hearing us come in, a teenage girl came from a back room to behind the bar to help us. We were surprised to see that closely following her was a wombat, intent on nipping her ankles. They obviously had a close relationship and the more she fended it away with her foot the more her furry friend tried to nibble at her. The girl told us she had had her pet since it was a baby and that it was ‘free range’, going wherever it wanted to, mainly sleeping inside but roaming free whenever it felt the need. It was lovely to see such an unusual interaction.

Our plan had been to move on to Dee Lagoon to a site we had identified last year, but speaking with two of the locals who came to fish, the trout in ‘Dee’ were, in their words, “hard, hmm, very hard to catch those trout in Dee”. During these conversations, Woods Lake was mentioned a few times and although my book on trout fishing in Tasmania said the road in was atrocious, I was now reliably informed it had recently been graded and was very good. I was also told of recent good catches of trout there, so our plans changed and with no idea of what we’d find there, we duly set off to explore Woods Lake, which my book also said was a ‘superb, under-utilised fishery’. Sounded like my kind of place.

### **Part 8 Trout in a lingerie bag.**

We arrived at Woods Lake mid afternoon Friday, after taking the 100km short cut gravel “C” road through Interlaken. The road in to ‘Woods’ certainly wasn’t atrocious, but it certainly wasn’t good either, although that’s subjective I suppose and it was good compared to the corrugated goat track we encountered going to Eddystone Lighthouse. What we hadn’t expected to see when we got to the lake was about twenty cars and boat trailers parked near the ramp, with boats and fishermen everywhere. I had imagined, foolishly, that we’d have the place to ourselves but it seemed like the lake was very well known to the locals and they were all there.

The good news was that they had all caught fish and not just fish, but BIG fish. One guy took the lid off his esky and revealed six beauties, all over four pounds with one up around six pounds. I had an adrenalin rush and eagerly sought advice from an old guy who had just come in with five fish as to prospective places to camp, there being nothing immediately obvious. “There’s a bit of space down that track there. There’s a young couple from Campbelltown, near Sydney, camped down there but they won’t mind” he said with a somewhat presumptuous confidence.



Woods Lake from our not so level and very rocky camp site

There was indeed a bit of space, close to the young couple’s old converted Toyota Land Cruiser traveling unit and, although it was rocky and sloped much more than we liked, not having seen any other spots, we elected to set up camp there. The young couple, Shane and Lauren were out fishing and returned whilst we setting up. I apologised for setting up so close, but fortunately they were very friendly and genuinely didn’t seem to mind as they excitedly showed us the three big trout they had just caught including one about five pounds. “Would you like one?” Shane asked, “We’re not really fish eaters but we’ll try one.”

Naturally we were delighted to accept the offer of a lovely brown trout of about four pounds. Once we were basically set up I launched the tinny and went out with high expectations of catching lots of big fish, still amazed at how many boats were on the water. I didn't catch lots of big fish, but did manage one about a pound and a half that was just enough for our dinner that first night.

The fish that Shane had given us deserved to be 'aged' and I explained to him that 'real trout fishermen' hang their fish for at least a day to dry the skin and let the flesh mature, not that I'd had personal experience of this but had read about it and been told first hand by locals on more than one occasion. To support this theory, there were bits of string and rope hanging from various trees, obvious left overs from previous fish hangings. In the old days they used Hessian bags that let the air in and kept the flies out and I pondered what we could use to hang our magnificent gift in.

As usual, Von came up with a good idea – she did that a lot on this trip –suggesting that I should use one of the old lingerie washing bags that she had donated for me to separate and store things in our 'odds and bits' box. The trout only just fitted, but that's all it had to do, so for the next day it hung from a nearby tree, resplendent in its lingerie bag.

Saturday was a most frustrating day. There were more than twenty vehicles and at the ramp and by now we had discovered there were other areas where we could have camped further around the lake near the dam, but too late to move now. And, unlike just about all of these fishermen who were catching good bags of big trout, neither Shane nor I caught anything despite trying hard during several sessions on the water. In fact, waking early, I was up and the first boat on the water before daylight, which only made the frustration worse, knowing others had put in at eight o'clock and had half a dozen fish by ten.

That night, I smoked Shane's fish with Huon Pine wood shavings and we shared it with them for dinner as there was plenty to go around. It was a good night and we sat around our camp fire talking 'till bed time.



Sunday was much quieter with only half the number of people fishing and not surprisingly, after the hammering the lake must have had recently, fewer fish were being caught. It wasn't possible for me to catch fewer than zero, but I equaled that achievement during a two and a half hour session during the morning. Shane and Lauren broke camp, leaving for Hamilton and late in the

My first decent Tasmanian Brown Trout – what a beauty!

afternoon, when only one or two boats remained, I decided to go out and try again.

Bingo! At last, a decent trout. It was only one, but a lovely brown trout of about four pounds, caught spinning with an Ashley lure I'd bought at the Campbell Town supermarket on our way from River and Rocks. I felt like the jinx had finally been lifted. This time it was my trout that we admired hanging in the lingerie bag as we sat around the fire outside eating dinner.

Then there were the bees; lots of bees and they all seemed to want a piece of my trout. I've never seen anything like it before, bees that are attracted to fish, but those that live around Woods Lake have definitely developed an aquatic taste. When I went to retrieve the trout there were dozens of bees swarming around the hanging bag and dozens more inside, crawling all over my piscatorial treasure.

We had quite a battle, the bees and I before I won the day with much flailing of a tea towel and managed to get the fish inside the annexe and shut the door on a posy of very unhappy hunters.

Yvonne also made a discovery that absolutely confirmed the Woods Lake bees have developed a taste for trout. She was at the boat ramp waiting for me to come in and noticed bees working on milt that someone cleaning their fish had left lying around. The bees were biting or scraping tiny bits from the milt, rolling it into a ball about the diameter of their bodies then flying off with it, assumedly to the hive to feed their precious queen. Amazing really and it begs the question, what would the honey taste like?

The day time weather here was superb. Dry and lovely warm sunny days with little or no cloud, but that also meant cold, cold nights under a clear star filled sky and full moon that had us wearing more and more to bed, track pants, jumpers, socks, beanie and Von even had a scarf and gloves on. But, warmth is king and that's what counts.

Monday morning was cold, really cold. We don't carry a thermometer in our kit, but I didn't need one to tell me it was freezing. I had been leaving the boat in the water over night with tackle box and rods etc in it and laid my life jacket over the tackle to stop dew making it wet. This morning when I heading down to the boat I noticed something strange about the life jacket, it was covered in a thick layer of frost and this was at eight o'clock, well after the sun was up.

I didn't catch any more trout at Woods Lake despite seeing more locals come in with good hauls. One pair I spoke to had eleven fish. The only thing you can say about that, is that I obviously have a lot to learn about catching trout in Tassie. However, we did see for the very first time, a mammalian sub-species that until now had only been the stuff of myth and rumour. Von and I had just pulled the boat up onto the rocky shore and were making our way back towards camp when the creature approached us, stepping carefully across the rocks.

It looked friendly enough but it wasn't until it spoke that we realised what we were dealing with. It, or rather he, was a Tasmanian Waterways and Fisheries Officer, and this was truly a rare and exciting encounter. This specimen obviously had very good eyesight as he politely made it clear he knew I did not have my life jacket on in the boat, an offence it seems, "wear it don't stow it" being the catch cry. Fortunately for me, the creature was in a good mood and just cautioned me, making mention though that if there were a next time, the fine was \$60. I had done the right thing and purchased a fishing license which was good, because that was the next thing he wanted to see. Also fortunate was that his eye sight had not been good enough to see Von fishing, as I hadn't bought a license for her and that would definitely have resulted in a fine. The rare and endangered Fisheries Officer bade us farewell, vowing to return the next day to see me in the life jacket, but he never did come back so we hope no ill befell him, particularly if he was the last of his kind.

Our time at Woods was great and it will definitely be on the itinerary again next time we venture to these parts, so, as Big Arnie would say, "I'll be back".

## **Part 9 Relaxing at Ransons and Cleaning up the Crap**

Making our way back up to the North East coast, our route took us through Longford and to an obligatory stop at the retail outlet of Tasman Meats (just off the main road through town) where we stocked up on steaks, sausages and bacon etc at very good prices. The abattoir is also on the site and for anyone traveling in the area, we can assure you this is a worthwhile stop. It also gave us an excuse to stop for morning tea and sample the cappuccino and tasty offerings at the award winning bakery just down the road. Once again, this is a highly recommended stop if in the Longford area and one I'm sure we'll make again.

Some people are just plain lazy, dirty and have no respect. I'm referring to the family who left all their rubbish at the site we chose at Casuarina Hill on Ransons Beach for our last major camp. Instead of taking it home with them as the sign spells out and common decency demands, they had left a large garbage bag full of crappy nappies, food remains and empty containers under the trees where the possums and other creatures had had a lovely time ripping it apart. They weren't the only ones though, as there were lots of cans and bottles strewn around, an accumulation from other thoughtless souls over the years.

So why camp there? Well it was a lovely site, protected from the ocean winds, which, given we were actually not too far from Petal Point, scene of our battering, was important, plus there was a good view and easy access to the beach.

As soon as we had set up, I dug a very large hole near to the fireplace, easy to do in the sandy soil and after Von and I had scoured the area collecting all the visible garbage, buried it, improving the place a thousand per cent.



Ransons Beach from our last campsite at Casuarina Hill

As much as we had enjoyed Woods Lake, it was great to be in a more temperate climate, not having to wear jumpers and beanie to bed and being able to go for that first call of nature in the morning without fear of your plumbing freezing up! Having said that, we decided cut short our stay by the ocean by one night in favour of moving closer to ‘civilisation’ for the last day, for two reasons. Firstly, the fishing at Ransons Beach was hopeless and neither Von nor I even had a bite, so we couldn’t be bothered wasting too much time on it. In the first two days we had pretty much explored the place with long walks along the beach each way and being a remote place, there was nothing else to see, so frankly we were getting bored and the prospect of spending our last day literally doing nothing did not appeal to either of us.

The second reason was that we, or more correctly I, had got the activity balance wrong on this trip and had not focussed enough on what Von may have wanted to do, which definitely included being able to wander through towns and shops at her own pace and have more and different contact with people other than just me – completely understandable. So we determined to travel on Anzac Day, have a one nighter relatively close to Ulverstone then Von could spend the Saturday doing whatever she wanted there or in Devonport. It was probably too little too late, but having recognised the issue, at least we can address it on our trip north once we leave Fraser Island in June.

As it turned out it was just as well we had decided to leave on Friday morning as in the middle of our packing up, six or seven utes towing trailers with dune buggies and trail bikes pulled up in the area adjacent to us and within minutes had engines revving and were heading for the beach. They were pleasant enough and a couple of the older guys, seeing us packing up came over and asked if they were ‘driving us out’. I’m not sure what they would have done if I’d said yes. I explained we were going anyway but would certainly not have continued to enjoy our stay as bikes and buggies were not our scene.

## Part 10 Keeping up the Tradition

We made our way to Bannon's Park, a site we had identified on previous trips, with Karen intent on taking us down several more gravel 'C' roads just to make sure Von didn't miss out. Bannon's Park is free camping, quite close to Wings Wildlife Park where we have stayed and paid, on the bank of the Leven River and in easy striking distance to Ulverstone and thence Devonport. We arrived at the same time as the rain, but given the great weather we've had on this trip, couldn't complain. We made a makeshift camp just 'flipping' the camper open with no annexe but we did throw the tarp over to keep as much of the canvas dry as possible.

The weather forecast had been for scattered showers, but the showers had other ideas and gathered rather than scattered into one heck of a downpour for most of the night and into the morning, meaning we kept up the tradition of (another) wet pack up. Our last day was spent dodging the rain in Ulverstone and Devonport giving Von some much needed retail



therapy, although many shops were closed on this Saturday of the Anzac Day long weekend. Even on normal weekends, we've found in Tasmania that there are a great many shops that don't open on Saturdays as a matter of course, something that seems quaint to those of us from 'New South' or 'the big island' as they like to refer to us in Van Diemen's Land.

Makeshift last camp at Bannon's Park – the rain kept us company.

The crossing of Bass Strait was a tad 'bumpy' on the "Spirit 1" but we survived OK and slept through most of it, arriving in Melbourne on time to yes, you've guessed, wet weather for the the 800kms drive home.

Thus ended our latest adventure in Tasmania, so until next time, au revoir, ciao, see y'all.

**Written by Gordon Tuthill April 2008**