

HOME > **AUSTRALIA TRAVEL**

Into the wild: Corinna, Tasmania's rainforest secret

Fiona Harper | Friday, May 24, 2013

Corinna's majestic Pieman River. Image: Fiona Harper.

Tasmania has some of the greatest natural wonders of Australia. Fiona Harper travelled to the Apple Isle's West Coast to see what the remote **Corinna Wilderness Experience** has to offer.

"The air is so crisp and clean that it smells exactly like pristine wilderness should smell."

At first glance, the instructions for crossing the Pieman River seem straightforward enough: "Drive up and down car park looking for bridge". Okay, that shouldn't be difficult.

Fiona Harper

Ahead of me the tranquil Pieman River is the deepest bottle green, reflecting mirror-like dense impenetrable forest that clings to steep-sided banks. At water level, iridescent emerald reeds bend in unison, their tips swaying rhythmically to the downstream current. The air is pungent with the kind of aroma found deep within a moist primeval rainforest.

More about Tasmania:

- > Northwest Tasmania
- > Southwest Tasmania
- > The top 10 beach houses in Tassie
- > Wineglass to wine glass
- > Walking the Cradle

Topics:

- Tasmania
- Corinna
- Australia

In the dank Tarkine forest, tall timbers thrive on the dampness found here. There's definitely an earthy rotting undergrowth smell but more pleasant is the overriding freshness in the air. The air is so crisp and clean that it smells exactly like pristine wilderness should smell.

Tasmania's wild poster child, the Huon pine, likes to keep its roots in water, making the banks of the Pieman the perfect fertile ground for this slow growing pine. Support players to Huon pines' starring role in this arboreal opera, sassafras, myrtle, blackwood and celery top pine share the limelight on the banks of the Pieman River. There is no bridge!

However, there is a pub. A wide timber-lined veranda wraps around the Tarkine Hotel on the north bank. Inside, a cast iron stove pumps out tendrils of welcome warmth across cosy couches in the bar and into the adjacent Tannin Restaurant. The pub is the hub of the Corinna community, previously a gold mining town, but now a highly credentialed wilderness getaway in the midst of the Tarkine forest.

The original town of Corinna was established in 1881 to service gold mining leases, though loggers had been harvesting Huon pine long before then. Discovery of Tasmania's largest ever nugget two years later in a tributary of the Pieman River, all 6.6kg of it, lured scores of gold-struck prospectors to Tasmania's isolated north west coast.

Sailing ships and steamers who tackled the hazardous river mouth provided the only real access to the goldfields, though ships could penetrate no further beyond a narrow bend known as Hells Gates. Forest was felled and buildings sprung up on either side of the river with two pubs to service both communities.

The Star Hotel on the south bank was built entirely from Huon pine, being dismantled after the gold rush ended and relocated to Zeehan. The current Tarkine Hotel sits adjacent to the original pub which is now guest accommodation. Rough cut floorboards, sloping ceilings and walls that aren't quite vertical add to its charm. But if that's a little too rustic, modern cottages that blend into the environment with minimal environmental footprints are also available.

Originating on the banks eight before dinner I find Capt. John McGee, who started exploring the Pieman River in the

<http://travel.ninemsn.com.au/australia/8664195/into-the-wild-corinna-tasmanias-rainforest-secret>

8 captures 31 Jan 2014 - 4 Dec 2017

for osprey and hawks. Making plans to join the boat leaving before dawn the next morning to drop off hikers, I leave him to enjoy a sumptuous dinner in Tannin Restaurant.

Pre-dawn the river is mesmerising with mirror-like reflections that make my head spin in a sort of altered state. Near the intersection of the Donaldson River we stop at Lovers Falls to clamber ashore, climbing the steps and boardwalk that wind around 40-year-old slender tree ferns known as Man Ferns. The falls themselves drop from an unseen creek high above, tumbling down a vertical moss-draped rock face that terminates in a teeny rock pool. The air is heavy with mist, creating floating rainbows that glint in the sunlight. Nearby on the Savage River, at low tide the wreck of the 1899 built steamship The Croydon pokes above the surface, her mechanical workings still visible far below the surface.

Picture-perfect Pieman River. Image: Fiona Harper.

Pieman Heads. Image: Fiona Harper.

Later we board the 53-foot Huon pine cruiser Arcadia II to venture further downstream. Bathed in warm light that bounces off the Huon pine-lined wheelhouse, Capt McGee shares more tales of the area as the forest gives way to a narrow river plain and beach. There's a handful of rustic cottages at Pieman Heads where the Southern Ocean crashes ashore, the river mouth a tangle of foams and jetsam washed ashore from who knows where. For almost 40 years until the late 1930s loner and sailor Johnny Ahrberg was the sole occupant of Pieman Heads. The original Ferryman, I wonder what life must have been like in this sort of self-imposed solitary confinement for a Swede so far from home.

Other stories abound, though it's hard to know where fact ends and fiction begins. It's said that the Pieman River was originally named Retreat River by Capt James Kelly after he became freaked out by horrendous conditions crossing the sand bar while seeking a safe harbour.

But I rather like the story of the two original pie men, both convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1816. Quite the gourmand, pastry cook Alexander Pearce escaped from Macquarie Harbour and resorted to cannibalism amongst fellow escapee as a survival strategy. Or fellow escapee Thomas Kent, a baker of note, who was recaptured on the banks of the Pieman near where the Tarkine Hotel now stands. No matter the true story, the band Weddings Parties Anything were also apparently quite taken with these tales, capturing the mood of the times in their song 'It's a Tale They Won't Believe'.

Peering into impenetrable forest I can hardly believe that anyone could survive in the forest, much less travel overland from Macquarie Harbour to Hobart. Well-marked trails branching out in all directions from Corinna allow trekkers to experience the magic of the Tarkine without resorting to such desperate measures as eating one's companion.

Curious to venture across the river having heard about some graves with Huon pine headstones, we search in earnest for the ferryman. Is he still in bed? With Chris de Burgh's 1980s pop song ("don't pay the Ferryman til he gets you to the other side") bouncing around inside my head, it takes all of two minutes for the Fatman Barge to make the crossing.

A short walk from the landing there is a track leading into the forest to two imposing Huon pine headstones draped in moss. Absorbing the silence and serenity of this wild forest where former publicans Thomas Davis and Gam Webster are laid to rest, the modern world briefly ceases to exist. Though incredibly beautiful, it is easy to imagine tough living conditions for those pioneers, prospectors and desperate escapees who have passed through this rugged wilderness.

Returning to the north bank the old pub looks much unchanged through the trees as it must have done in the 1880s. We take the ferryman. Chris de Burgh remains annoyingly on monotonous rewind in my head. There is no bridge.

The writer was a guest of Corinna Wilderness Experience. More info at www.corinna.com.au.

In pics: [Top 10 Aussie national parks revealed](#)



Australia's top 10 national parks

[VIEW SLIDESHOW](#)

results by **bing**

More results from Bing: [web](#) | [videos](#) | [images](#)

User comments

what a beautiful place, on the list to see Lets hope it isn't mined or the trees felled for paper for some overseas country

it sounds like a place lost in the mists of time,i hope this area never finds the modern stressful world we seem to be racing deeper and deeper into,i hope to visit tassy next year ,and after seeing this story im going to see it for myself ,thanks for the story .cheers paul

WRITE A COMMENT

Email: *

Your email will not be shared with any third parties or published with your comment.

Nickname: *

Location: *

Subject: *

Comment: *

Maximum characters 1000 * Indicates required field

[PREVIEW](#) [SUBMIT](#)

Comment guidelines

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Avoid using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal attacks HTML tags Offensive language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irrelevant comments Personal information Text in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS |
|--|--|
- See full comment guidelines

HOTELS | **FLIGHTS**

Find the best prices for hotels powered by WEGO

1 Enter your destination

2 Specify travel dates and rooms required

Check-in Check-out Rooms Guests

[SEARCH HOTELS](#)

TODAY'S TRAVEL DEALS

MORE TRAVEL DEALS

NEWSLETTER powered by WEGO

Get the best travel deals

Up to 75% off [SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)

WORST THINGS ABOUT FLYING

Go FEB MAR APR

16

2013 2014 2017

annoying things about flying. 


LATEST BLOG




Japanese airline slammed over miniskirts

[View all blogs](#)

ninemsn Shopping



Lowepro Video Pouch 20 Black \$12



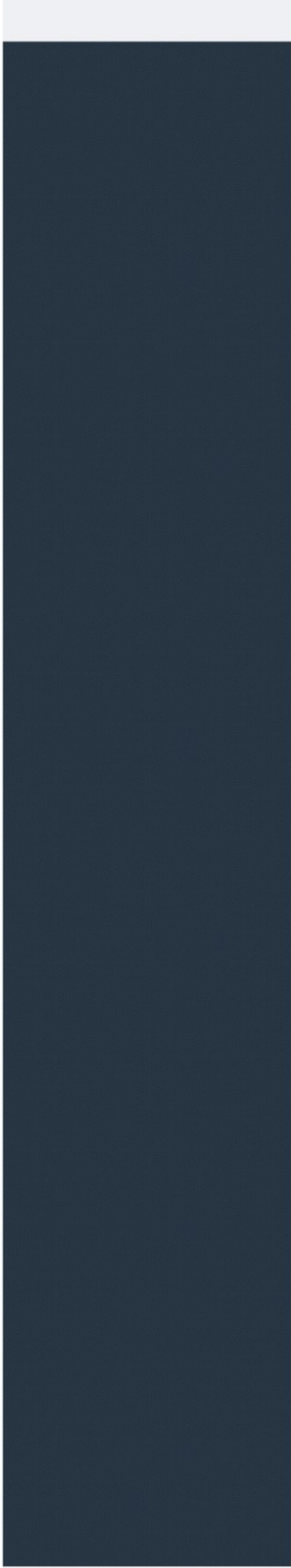
Pentax K-30 White Digital SLR... \$844

Powered by **GETPRICE** [View more products](#)

POPULAR SEARCHES

- 1 Cheap flights
- 2 Best travel deals
- 3 Travel Australia
- 4 Things to do on the Gold Coast
- 5 Thailand holidays
- 6 Cheap accommodation
- 7 Melbourne hotels
- 8 Last minute flights
- 9 Places to stay in Sydney
- 10 Last minute hotel deals

TRAVEL AT A GLANCE



<p>Cars</p> <p>Rently Continental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Sell your car fast! · Latest car reviews 	<p>Careers</p> <p>Teaching Courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Online Courses · SEEK iPhone app 	<p>Real Estate</p> <p>Properties for sale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Search for properties · Visit our blog 	<p>RateCity</p> <p>Compare and Save</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Home loans · Credit Cards 	<p>eHarmony Dating</p> <p>Review matches free</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Meet matches free · Success stories 	<p>Travel Deals</p> <p>Escape the everyday!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Island getaways · Retreats for couples
--	---	--	---	---	--