

Little Island, BIG ADVENTURE

With its fantastic lakes and rugged mountains,
Tasmania's Florentine Valley is a wilderness just
begging to be explored

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Lake Repulse, despite its name had amazing clear waters, and was perfect for kayaking



The forests provide ample opportunities to get the tyres muddy

Tasmania's rugged mountains tower over huge lakes and untamed old growth forest. They draw you in with promises of solitude and adventure with hundreds of dirt tracks to drive, to get lost on and to explore. There are always places to hide away for the night, and you can take advantage of everything the wilderness has to offer.

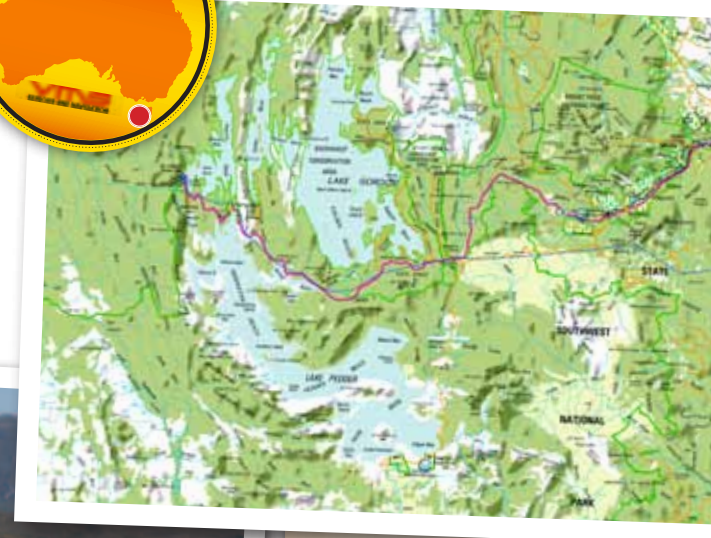
Taking the Spirit of Tasmania across Bass Strait can sometimes be a bit rough, but if you are lucky you can get a 'you beaut' crossing. From Devonport you're in the right place to start the hunt to find dirt roads and good bush camping as you head south towards Tassie's rugged west coast.

The Florentine Valley, riddled with caves, underground streams and sinkholes, was the last known habitat of the Tasmanian tiger before it was

hunted to extinction, and it holds Aboriginal heritage sites dating back 30,000 years. It's nestled between Wayatinah, Ouse and Maydena and has a collection of forest tracks running from north to south, making the perfect alternative to the main bitumen highway. This route is a maze of tracks providing the 4WDer with a choice of easy to moderate



What better way to relax than wetting a line at Lake Pedder



It's not hard to see why Russell Falls are one of the most photographed waterfalls in Tasmania

THIS IS THE VERY DEFINITION OF WATERFRONT CAMPING



We were able to set up camp right near the water's edge at Lake Repulse

WHERE:

Tasmania's Florentine Valley stretches almost 50km from Wayatinah, heads south towards Maydena, and it's a further 80km west to Lakes Pedder and Gordon. To get there, if you're disembarking the ferry at Devonport, it's a three-hour drive south to Wayatinah, while Maydena is only 90 minutes northeast of Hobart

MAPS AND GUIDES:

HEMA Tasmania State Map - Camps 5 - Off Road Tasmania by Chris Bowden.

INFORMATION:

The Florentine Valley offers 4WDing through pristine wilderness areas, along with fishing, bushwalks, beautiful lakes Gordon Dam and some of the most spectacular view you will see.



The stunning Gordon Dam is 140m high

options. There were a couple of occasions when we took an 'alternative' route only to find the road had been closed due to forestry logging. It would be easy to lose yourself for days, so make sure you have adequate maps and weather information before you start and ensure you continually monitor UHF Channel 38 for logging trucks.

It's gravel road heading south from Wayatinah, and if you intend to head in from the east along Jungle Road from Ouse, make sure you can get under the 2.4m clearance at the bridge on the Lake Repulse road. It would be a shame to make a mess of the kayaks, mountain bikes or roof

top tents on top of the truck before you got to use them!

There are several bushwalks leading from various parts of the tracks, so don't forget the walking boots! Just off the southern end of the Florentine Valley is an old logging tramway track leading to Growling Swallet. It's a 45 minute flat but muddy walk to a creek that disappears into the deepest limestone cave system in the southern hemisphere; a cave with an entrance that is so spectacular it looks more like a temple. The creek emerges at June Cave, 30km away near Madena. The cave has been known to growl when the water

levels are high.

Unfortunately, the track leading up to Mount Tim Shea now has a locked gate, but for the more dedicated explorer the 3.5km walk will give the most spectacular views over the entire surrounding areas.

It's difficult to stop yourself from saying 'wow' whenever the forest opens up. The scenery is just outstanding with one mountain after another, layer upon layer, disappearing into the distance.

Even though the camping areas are basic and mostly with no facilities, being in amongst the pine plantations provides shelter away from the crowds



The whole family will the activities available at Lake Repulse



The forest tracks were still quite wet in places



and we found just the spot for us at Lake Repulse. This is the very definition of waterfront camping. It is the perfect place to relax, have a swim, do a spot of fishing and has 4WD tracks of its own heading off into the forests. When full the lake covers an area of around 160 hectares and is fed by the Derwent and Repulse rivers. The water was very clear and surprisingly warm. We woke to a beautiful mist hovering over the water in the morning.

With so many lakes and dams throughout Tasmania, you really need some way of getting out on the water, either with kayaks to keep the kids entertained, or

tinnies for fishing and exploring. The family camped next to us had the perfect solution and we were envious watching the kids paddle by in their kayaks while Dad did a spot of fishing in the tinnie. Most of the campsites are in timber-laden areas so collecting firewood is easy, however some places do ask you not to forage for timber within the forest, so make sure you always have ample supplies before your stop for the night, it can get very cold.

At Wayatina there is a commercial campsite with all the usual facilities, and in the town fuel and provisions are available. Bethune Park near the Lyall Highway at Ouse is a pleasant

grassy open campsite with toilets by Meadowbank Lake.

Lakes Pedder and Gordon are at the northern end of the wilderness area in Southwest National Park. The 120km drive from the highway to Strathgordon, whilst on bitumen, was nothing short of spectacular and when you reach the end of the road you are greeted with the massive Gordon Dam, and I mean massive! There are some things you just can't capture on camera and the size of the dam wall is one of them. If you're not afraid of heights you can abseil the 140 metre dam wall. It is considered one of the top adrenaline activities in the world today.

Lake Pedder was once called the jewel in the wilderness but amongst an international environmental furore it was flooded in 1972 for a relatively minor hydroelectric scheme. Calls for the lake to be restored to its original beauty are still ongoing. Camp up at Ted's Beach, throw a line in the lake and do some

CAMPsites:

Free bush camping is available almost everywhere in the forest areas and the 'Camp 5' book lists all of the popular sites. You can also camp at the Mt Field National Park at modest fees. A Parks Pass is required in addition to fees at many campsites, see www.parks.tas.gov.au for full details. A commercial campsite with most facilities is available at Wayatina.

Lake Pedder Edgar Campground
GPS - 43° 1'54"S 146°20'27"E



Teds Beach
GPS - 42°47'18"S 146° 3'36"E



Wayatina Campground
GPS - 42°23'7"S 146°30'20"E



FUEL & SUPPLIES:

Diesel varied between \$1.55 and \$1.85 per litre and ULP was marginally cheaper.
Hobart
Diesel: \$1.55/L
Unleaded: \$1.49/L

BUDGET ATTRACTIONS:

Fishing is popular on Lakes Pedder and Repulse as is kayaking. There are many bushwalks available, and the walk across Gordon Dam is worth it if you have a head for heights.

Some of the mountain tracks through the valley are quite mild, whilst others can be for the more adventurous



You should have seen the one that got away

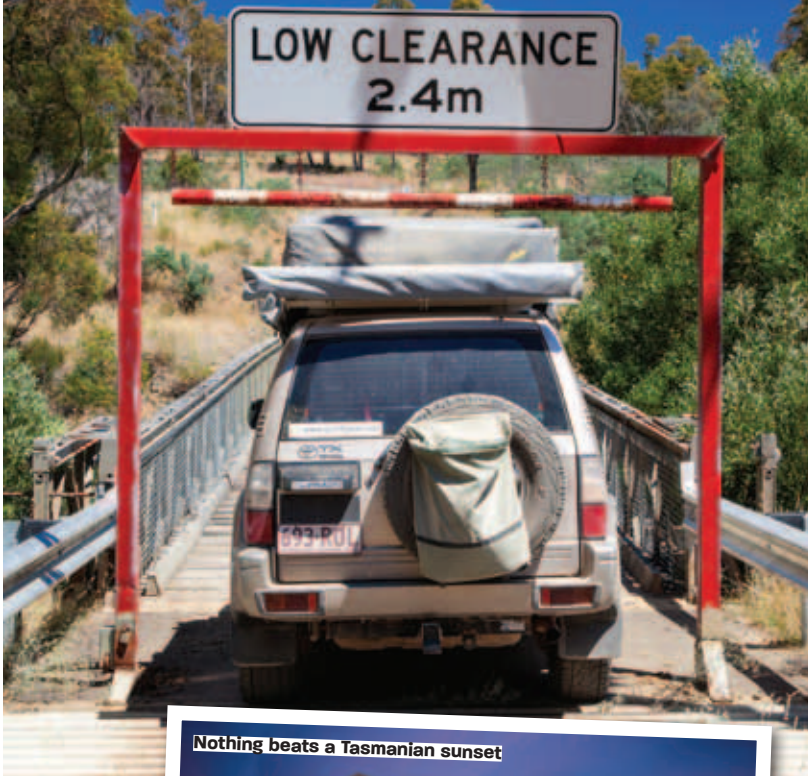


IT'S AWE-INSPIRING WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE MAP AND SEE HOW FAR YOU HAVE VENTURED INTO THE WILDERNESS



TRAVEL. The Florentine Valley, TAS

Make sure you can get under the 2.4m clearance at the bridge on the Lake Repulse road



Nothing beats a Tasmanian sunset



A CREEK DISAPPEARS INTO THE DEEPEST LIMESTONE CAVE SYSTEM IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE



more Tassie chilling! A stunning drive along a stretch of gravel road takes you to two more bush campsites on the southern side of the lake. They all have boat ramps for gaining access and are just perfect if you want to catch a famous Pedder trout.

It's quite awe-inspiring when you look at the map and see just how far you have ventured into the great wilderness of the South West National Park.

As you drive out just past Maydena, make sure you take time to stop for a walk up to Russell Falls, situated on the edge of the Mt Field NP. It boasts of being one of the most photographed waterfalls in Tasmania so don't forget your camera! There is also a superb tall trees walk that continues on to Lady Barron Falls. It was great to find a campground right next to the Visitor Centre. It's set in a pleasant forest by the Tyenna River and can provide that much-needed hot shower.

At first glance when you look at the maps, the Florentine Valley and the surrounding areas seem like a quick back road detour to get off the bitumen, but it is so much more. You won't realise just how fantastic this little piece of Australia is until you are actually there. It really makes you want to get out and explore more of the hidden delights that the rest of this wonderful island state has to offer. ▲

WHAT TO TAKE:

Make sure you have all your recovery gear, a 12V air compressor, essential spares and tools. A SPOT-tracking device is a good idea, and you should never leave home without a good first aid kit. Be certain you know how to use it all!

BEST TIME TO TRAVEL:

Tasmania's weather can be unpredictable at all times, but the summer months are warmest.

THINGS TO DO:

Mum: Great bush walks and stunning scenery.

Dad: Fishing and 4WDing.

Kids: Kayaking on the lakes.

THINGS TO SEE ON THE WAY:

There is enough variety to keep the whole family occupied, whether your interest is fishing, photography, bushwalking, kayaking, bird watching or just getting away from it all.

TRIP STANDARD:

Trips are rated A through to E, with A meaning only suitable to vehicles with an extreme level of modification, and E suitable for all types of 4WDs.

Most of the off-road part of trip rating was D. When we did the trip it was dry and most of the forest tracks were well graded and generally in good condition. Parts of some of the tracks have some rougher or steep sections that would be a C rating, and it wouldn't take much rain for any of it to get really tricky though, so be well prepared.

RESTRICTIONS AND PERMITS:

A 'Parks Pass' is required in all of the National Parks, see www.parks.tas.gov.au for full details. You can purchase online or it's sold at a discount on the Spirit of Tasmania ferry.

KEY CONTACTS:

Ferry: www.spiritoftasmania.com.au
National Parks info: www.parks.tas.gov.au

AUTHOR'S OPINION:

What was your favourite part of the trip?

The campsite at Lake Repulse had beautiful camping right on the water and was just so peaceful.

Where else have you been recently?

Our last trip was to Cameron Corner and Lake Eyre via the Flinders Ranges.

Where are you heading next and why?

We're heading out to Bidegolly Lake and Currawinya NP between Thargominda, Cunnamulla and Hungerford, to enjoy the birdlife and photography.