

West Coast Tasmania

SOMEWHERE TO GO

TASSIE HARD-CORE ADVENTURES

Tasmania's west coast can be brutal at times and awesome at others. Add a mix of rock, miles of beaches with quicksand and mud and you have an adventure you can talk about for years



WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTHONY KILNER

AUSTRALIAN 4WD MONTHLY 211

Joining up with the Devonport 4WD Club, our journey began at Arthur River Ranger Station to fill in paperwork for permits and pay camping fees. The rangers wouldn't allow a large group to go all the way to the Pieman River, which was a bummer, but they did give the okay to go to Interview River, which was still a pretty spot to visit.

The camping spot for the first night was at Sandy Cape in a secluded, treed area half a kilometre from the beach. Only one track runs to the beach from Arthur River to the Cape, although there are myriad tracks leading to huts, light houses and rocky coves.

Next stop was Interview River, before heading into an abandoned tin mine and, eventually, fun in the dunes that run for miles along the beach.

The beach and dunes around Sandy Cape are awesome. The sand varied from firm to very soft, from flat as a pancake to heavily undulated, which meant just cruising along carefully and picking your way through. There were also creek-type crossings to negotiate where fresh water meets the sea.

River crossings where the fresh water meets the salt water required patience and timing to avoid strong tidal flows

At Interview River, some time was spent exploring Aboriginal middens, just off the beach in an area covered low undergrowth. Aboriginal occupation along this stretch of coast is as old as anywhere in Tassie. In fact, the whole Arthur Pieman Conservation area is under review with regards to four-wheel driving, recreational activities and grazing. Hopefully, a management plan will reflect the practicalities and not block access to the pristine piece of bushland still protect the sensitive areas for all people to enjoy.

Leading the crew on this trip was Brian Imlac, who has been exploring and playing along the west coast for years. After the beach run, he took us through some very tight, overgrown tracks to the Interview Mine Hut ruins, then onto the Interview River Mine.

Heading back onto the beach, we experienced quicksand for the first time. It looked like a wet sand patch until you drove over it and the surface rippled like a waterbed. Brian became caught in it and only just managed to free himself, while Glenn Williams got his 4Runner well and truly stuck. With another successful recovery job, it was back down the beach.

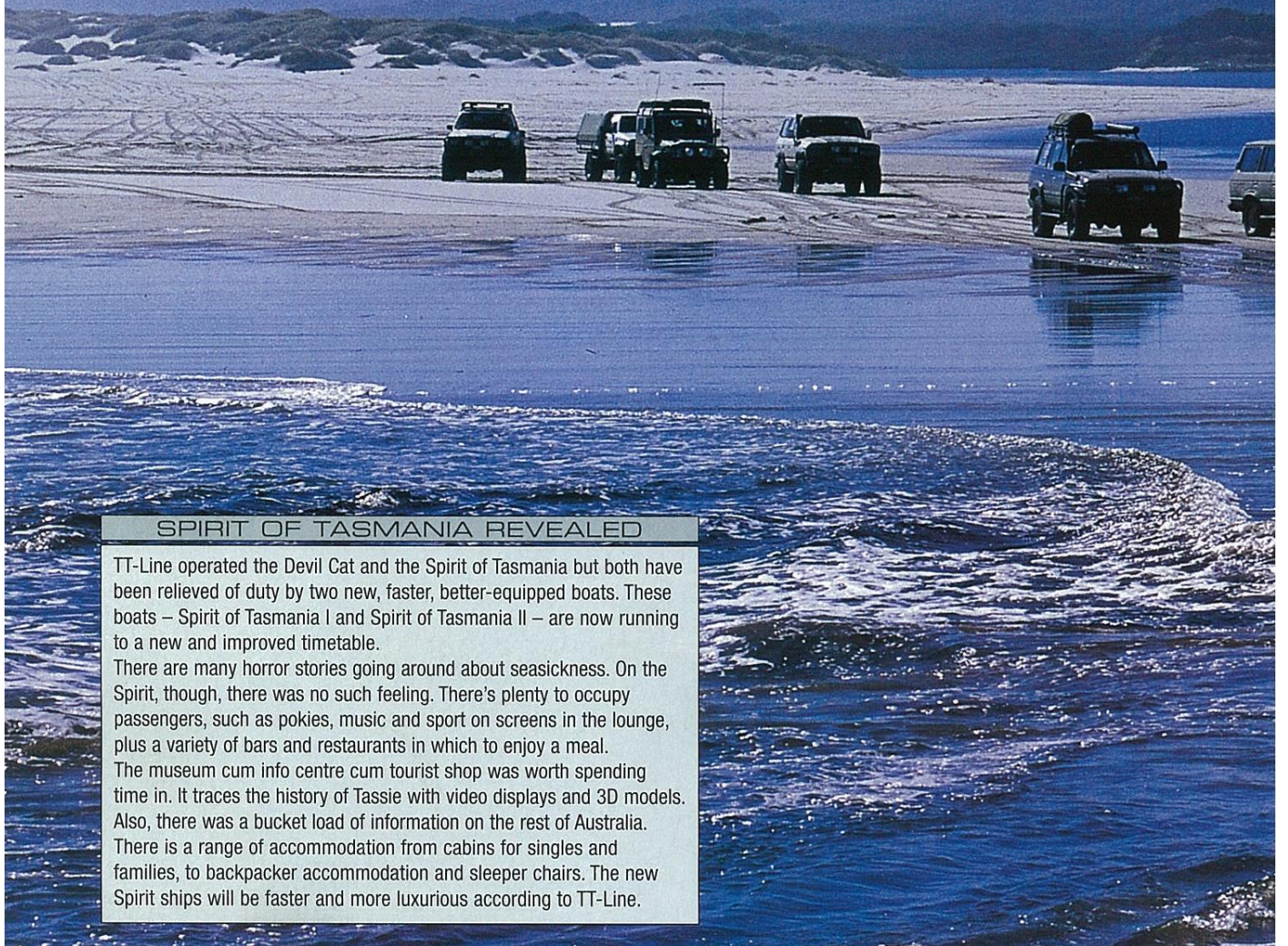
SPIRIT OF TASMANIA REVEALED

TT-Line operated the Devil Cat and the Spirit of Tasmania but both have been relieved of duty by two new, faster, better-equipped boats. These boats – Spirit of Tasmania I and Spirit of Tasmania II – are now running to a new and improved timetable.

There are many horror stories going around about seasickness. On the Spirit, though, there was no such feeling. There's plenty to occupy passengers, such as pokies, music and sport on screens in the lounge, plus a variety of bars and restaurants in which to enjoy a meal.

The museum cum info centre cum tourist shop was worth spending time in. It traces the history of Tassie with video displays and 3D models. Also, there was a bucket load of information on the rest of Australia.

There is a range of accommodation from cabins for singles and families, to backpacker accommodation and sleeper chairs. The new Spirit ships will be faster and more luxurious according to TT-Line.



find some dunes to play in before an evening around the fire. There was plenty of action on the dunes for the 'boys' in the club, which relieved the tension of the slow-going inland tracks.

Quicksand moves from area to area for no discernible reason. We were told about a ranger who was caught alone in quicksand and watched helplessly as his Tojo sunk to the floor pan within minutes. He walked out for help and, when he returned six hours later, there was no sign of water – he simply drove his 'Cruiser out! Scary stuff for the lone traveller!

Balfour to Strahan

Balfour, or what's left of it, was a great spot for lunch. There are ruins here to wander around, old gravesites that are quite a walk from the old town, and several walking tracks for the more energetic, including one that leads to the Franklin River. There's very little left, considering the town boomed in the early 1900s. It was first populated in the 1880s and eventually had a horse-drawn rail link between Balfour and Temma on the coast. In its heyday, there was a

school, pub, police station and more, with tin mining the main source of employment.

At Zeehan there was plenty of activity as people filled fourbies, grabbed supplies and joked about the day's action and who had gotten through which bogholes. About the only thing still lacking on this trip so far was some sunshine and warmth.

The track from Granville to Trial Harbour is one that has undergone a lot of work by the 4WD clubs of Tassie. Bridges have been repaired and a fight has been ongoing with the Tasmanian Government, which wants to close the track to all traffic.

The track is stunning, tight and rocky in places as it winds between rocky sections of coast and the Mount Heemskirk range. The really hard-core stuff – if you don't count the beaches and quicksand – starts at the turn-off to Lake Cumberland near Trial Harbour.

It was on this track that 'Shorty' in his 40 Series shorty rolled onto his side twice. Good suspension travel and tyres are a prerequisite before tackling this track, and lockers would definitely help.



Heading back onto the beach
we experienced quicksand
for the first time

FACT FILE



Getting There: You can take your fourby to Tassie from Melbourne on the new Spirits of Tasmania. Bookings are made through TT-Line, which operates both vessels.

Attractions: Beach driving with four-wheel drives or motorbikes (vehicles must be registered), fishing, bushwalking, photography, snorkelling, horse riding, canoeing, diving and bird watching.

Camping: Camping is in designated areas only; all fires must be in the fireplaces provided and you must bring your own firewood. All rubbish must be taken out with you. Refer to the camping guides for more info.

Permits and Restrictions: Camping and driving permits are required. A fishing licence is required. These can be obtained from the ranger station at Arthur River.

Fuel and Supplies: Marrawah, Strahan and Zeehan have fuel, supplies and a range of accommodation services available. Redpa has fuel and basic supplies.

Contacts: TT-Line reservations and general enquires – Ph: 13 20 10
TT-Line accommodation packages – Ph: 1800 811 580
TT-Line website: www.tt-line.com.au
Parks Office Arthur River – Ph: (03) 6457 1225
Parks & Wildlife Service, Hobart – Ph: (03) 6336 5312
Tassie Tourism – Ph: (03) 6230 8233 or www.tourism.tas.gov.au
Arthur River Canoe Hire – Ph: (03) 6457 1312
Arthur River Cruises – Ph: (03) 6457 1158
Strahan BP Service Station – Ph: (03) 6471 7218
Strahan Visitor Centre – Ph: (03) 6471 7622

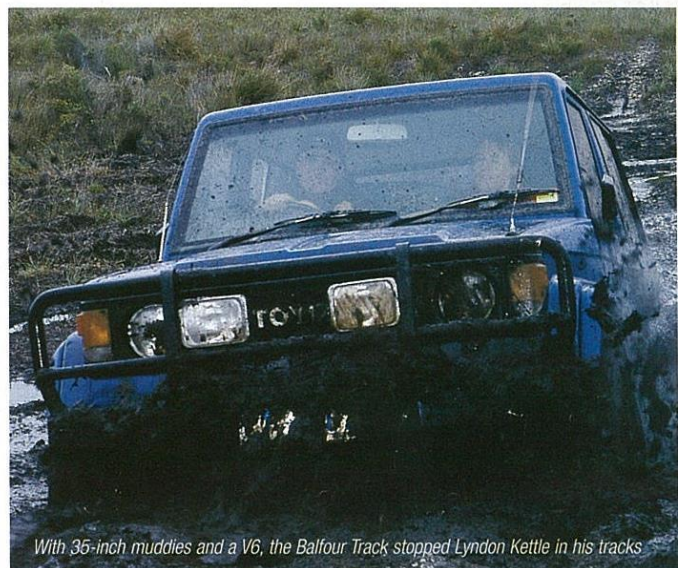
Maps Used: We used a range of maps to cover this area. *Tasmania North West* 1:250,000 put out by the Tasmanian Government; *Nelson Bay* 1:100,000 topographic map; *A Camping Guide to Tasmania* by Boiling Billy Publications; *The Visitors Guide to Tasmania* supplied by Tassie tourism; and *Explore Tasmania* from Penguin.

We used *4WD Tracks in Tasmania* by Chris Boden as a main source of trek information. Boden's book is a must for anyone travelling this area. He has detailed trek notes, warnings and history on the whole of Tassie, but it was most valuable for the west-coast run. For those with time, there's a hell of a lot more to do in the areas we visited and it's all in his book. It costs \$34.95 and can be obtained by sending a cheque to Roving Tasmania, PO Box 30, Rosny Park, TAS 7018. Alternatively, you can order by Ph/Fax: (03) 6244 2491.

These maps and books are available from all good map shops including Melbourne Map Centre (Ph: (03) 9569 5472), or from the respective publishers. Tassie Tourism also has loads of info on these areas.



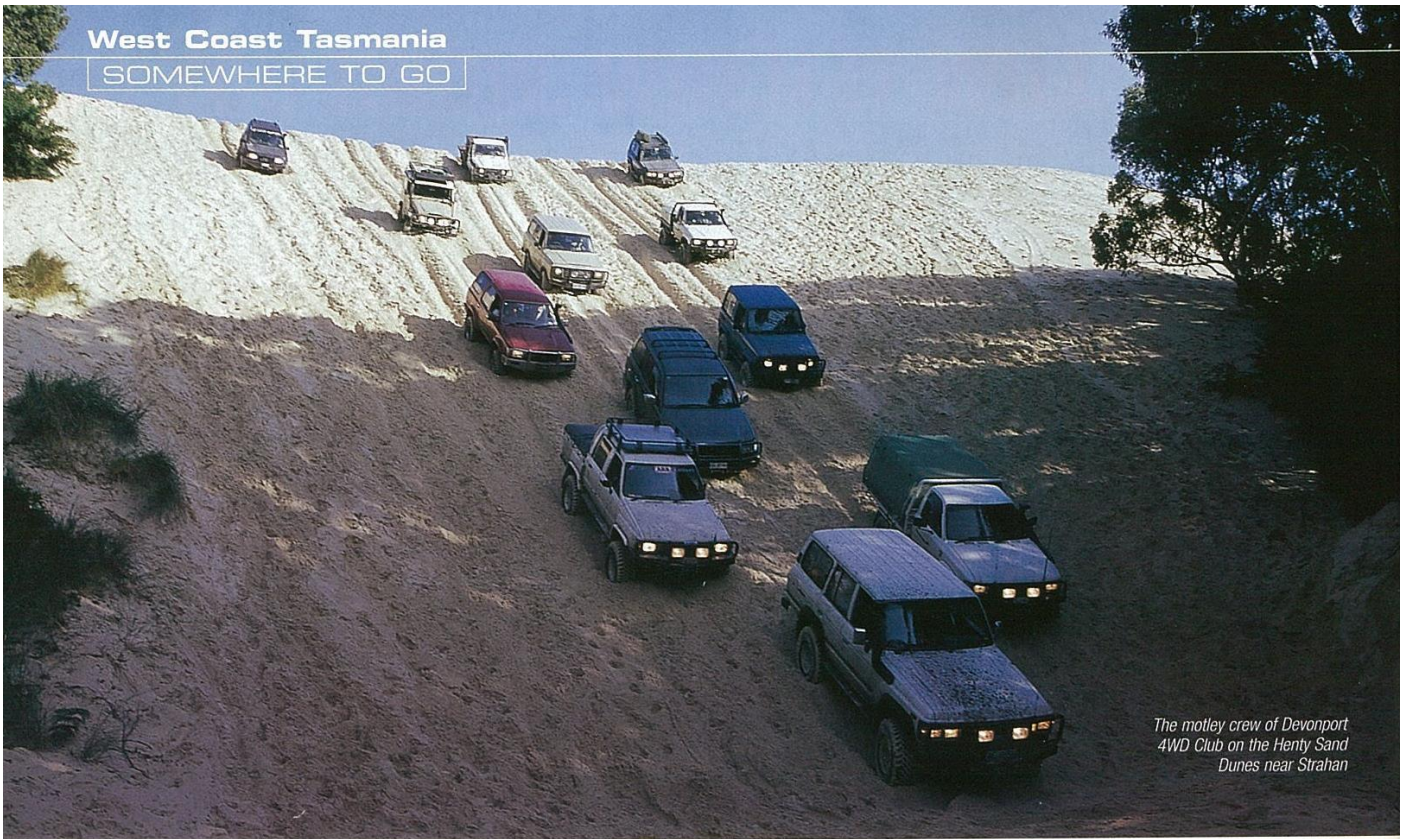
Scott Anderson, in his Vitara showed that a small fourby could keep up with the big boys



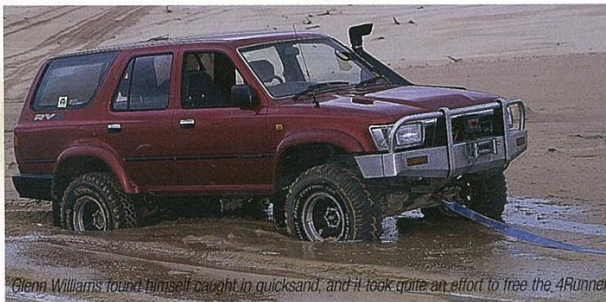
With 35-inch muddies and a V6, the Balfour Track stopped Lyndon Kettle in his tracks

West Coast Tasmania

SOMEWHERE TO GO



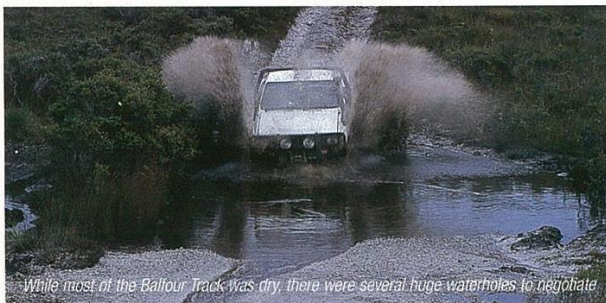
The motley crew of Devonport 4WD Club on the Henty Sand Dunes near Strahan



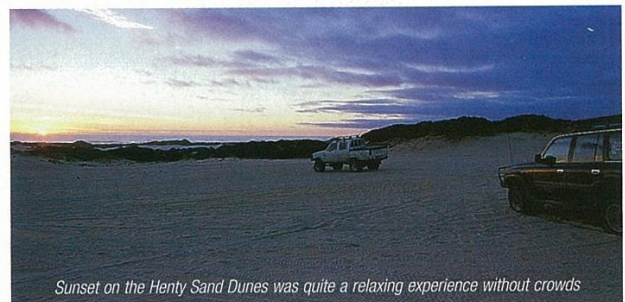
Glenn Williams found himself caught in quicksand, and it took quite an effort to free the 4Runner



Byndon Kettle pushed his V6-powered Bundy up the dunes, enjoying the view from the air



While most of the Balfour Track was dry, there were several huge waterholes to negotiate



Sunset on the Henty Sand Dunes was quite a relaxing experience without crowds

There are rocky sections out in the open that will test most people, plus a stretch that goes through thick rain-forest-type bush that leads up to a plateau. From here, you walk for a kilometre or so to the lake. It's an easy walk and well worth the effort.

Back at Trial Harbour (itself a delight to explore), it was time to air down again before hitting the beach and the run to Strahan. There are several tidal river crossings along this stretch, so waiting for tidal currents to be just right before tackling them in twos and threes is a must.

Hitting Strahan late in the afternoon, it was time to explore this picturesque town. There are full amenities here with plenty of accommodation from B&Bs to bush camping areas. As a large group, we camped out near the Henty Sand Dunes, a spectacular set of dunes not far from Strahan. After playing on the dunes the next morning, it was off to Devonport and onto the Spirit of Tasmania back to Melbourne.

If you're after a bit of hard-core Tassie action combined with magnificent scenery and views, this area is highly recommended. 