

SHIFTING SANDS



Tasmania's north-east coast, near Bridport, is the perfect playground for beach driving, fishing and bird watching

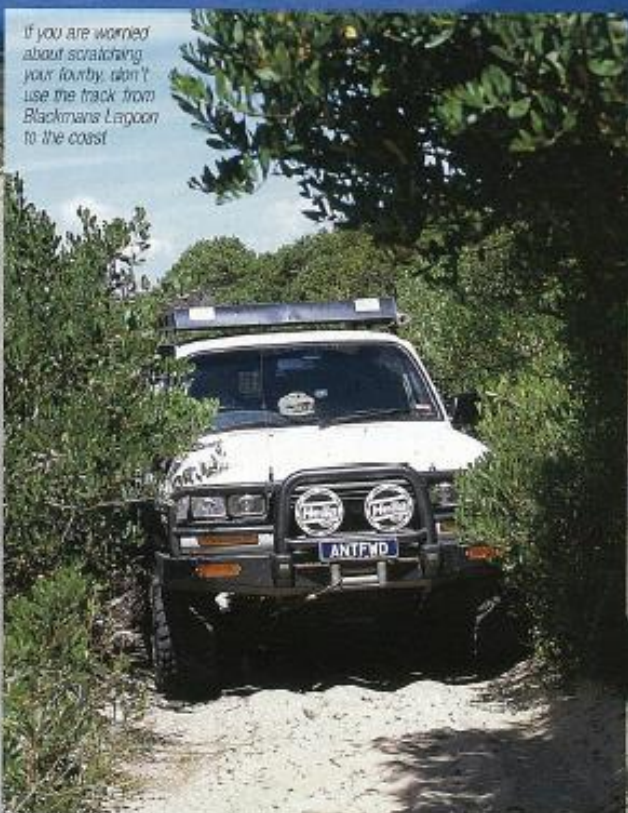
WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTHONY KILNER



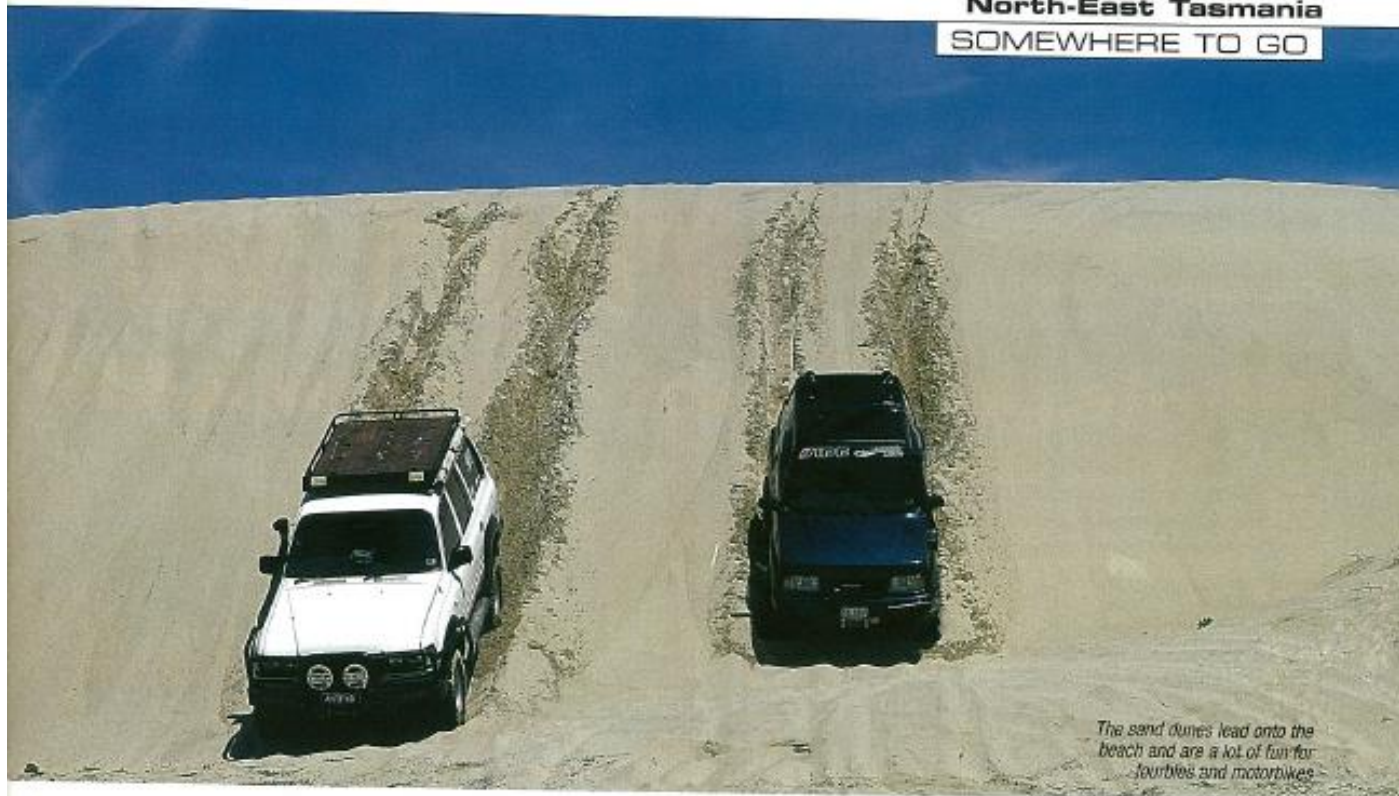
In most places, the sand was firm and easy driving.



The beach run along Anderson Bay terminates at South Croppies Point.



If you are worried about scratching your 4WD, don't use the track from Blackmans Lagoon to the coast.



The sand dunes lead onto the beach and are a lot of fun for fourbies and motorbikes

I couldn't get out of the 'Cruiser quickly enough. Trying to get the camera and organise Richard into the driver's seat at the same time, I almost fell out in the rush – things were looking pretty hairy for Scott Anderson in his Vitara.

He'd taken off up one of the highest dune sections near Bridport, in Tassie's north-east, when the soft white sand gave way taking Scott from his intended course, up the right-hand side of the dune, across to the left on a horrible angle. With some trepidation we watched as he stopped, selected reverse gear and gently backed down, straightening up the Zook as he came, in a skilful display of vehicle control.

With a deep breath he explained that he and several members of his club had been up this dune on an earlier trip, but due to the hot weather the dune had obviously dried out quite a bit since then, making it virtually impossible to get over.

As with any sand dune, the right angle of approach, along with the right tyres and tyre pressures, is crucial to avoid a roll-over. If the Vitara didn't get up, I wasn't going to push the much heavier 'Cruiser into a potentially messy situation,

so we opted to drive around the dune and come up from the easy side. It was worth the effort. The views over Bass Strait were stunning and you could see for miles along the coast with its low vegetation framing the vista.

After more photos around the dunes, it was back onto the beach for a bite of lunch before heading to Bridport to refuel.

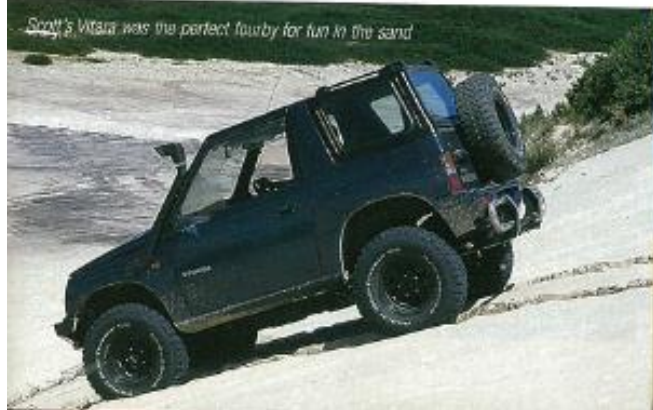
Bridport is 96km from Launceston via Lilydale, or 60km from George Town.

The best way to sample this area is to do the beach run from Bellingham to Bridport and further east towards Tomahawk, rather than to stick to the main roads.

Bellingham is accessed by taking the C852 from the B82, which is the main road that runs east from George Town. A small coastal town on the Pipers River, Bellingham has only boat-launching facilities and a small camping ground. There's no fuel or any supplies available here so you must take everything with you.

The run from Bellingham to Bridport will take less than a day, unless you spend time playing on the dunes or fishing. The track leading to Fordington in Noland Bay, where you hit the beach, is a little obscure and difficult to find, with

Scott's Vitara was the perfect fourby for fun in the sand



Soft sand will catch you easily, as Scott found out. A little digging was required before he drove out



North-East Tasmania

SOMEWHERE TO GO

tracks leading in every direction. On the outskirts of Bellingham you'll see a 40km speed-limit sign. Turn right here onto the dirt track that follows the fence line for a couple of kilometres until you hit a Y-junction, and turn right again. At the next Y-junction veer left and follow this sometimes-overgrown track less than a kilometre to the beach.

Drop your tyre pressures and turn right down the beach. If the weather's being kind to you, looking out over Bass Strait, you'll enjoy long stretches of white sand and beautiful blue water. Make sure you consult a tide chart because where Little Pipers Creek flows into the ocean can be tricky if the tide is up.

From the beach at Bellingham, it's 13.7km to the start of the dunes area. Following the beach along for another 3.2km, there's a track on the right that takes you past some rusty signposts and on towards Bridport, where there's virtually everything you need to restock supplies.

Heading east out of Bridport, follow the B82 for roughly 22km to the turn-off to Blackmans Lagoon. Turn left here and follow the tracks to the lagoon. Virtually on the banks of the lagoon, the road to the beach branches off to the left of the main signpost, near some cottages. This track is sandy and heavily overgrown in sections. If you are at all worried about scratching your fourby, I'd suggest accessing the beach from the track around South Croppies Head via Waterhouse.

Blackmans Lagoon and Waterhouse Lakes are popular fishing spots where, apparently, the trout fishing is very good. Once on the beach at Anderson Bay, you can turn west to find your own little secluded beach front, or east towards South Croppies Point. The track from here leads you up around Hardwicks Hill and along the coast towards Waterhouse Point and Ringarooma Bay.

There are numerous beachside and bush-camping areas along the headland leading towards Tomahawk. The sort of camping area you will find depends on how busy the area is. You can access Tomahawk via the beach from Waterhouse Point, but it is only open at certain times of the year for conservation purposes. For the rest of the time, it's a short drive on good dirt tracks to get to Tomahawk.

There are plenty of facilities at Tomahawk, including a caravan and camping area, fuel and shops to restock your supplies. Along the Ringarooma coastline are yet more sand dunes, and the fishing from the Tomahawk River is said to be pretty good as well.

You can do this trip in a long day from Launceston, but we'd recommend spending a couple of days in and around the area. The sand driving is excellent with the dunes a great place to have some real fun. We've stayed mostly to the coastline, but inland you'll find mining areas and forest trails to explore, all of which make great one-day trips from Bridport or Tomahawk.

FACT FILE



Bridport, Tasmania

Where: Bridport, in north-east Tasmania, is 96km from Launceston via Lilydale, or 60km from George Town.

Camping: Camping is in designated areas only; all fires must be in the fireplaces provided; you must bring your own firewood; and all rubbish must be taken with you when you leave. Dogs are allowed in several camping areas but must be on a lead and under control at all times. Refer to the camping guides for more info.

Permits and fees: Camping fees are required in some camps. A fishing licence is required.

Accommodation and Supplies: Launceston, George Town, Bridport and Tomahawk all have fuel, supplies and a range of accommodation services available.

Information:

TT Line reservations and enquiries: 13 20 10

TT Line website: www.tt-line.com.au

Parks & Wildlife Service Bridport: (03) 6356 0451

Tassie Tourism: (03) 6230 8233 or www.tourism.tas.gov.au

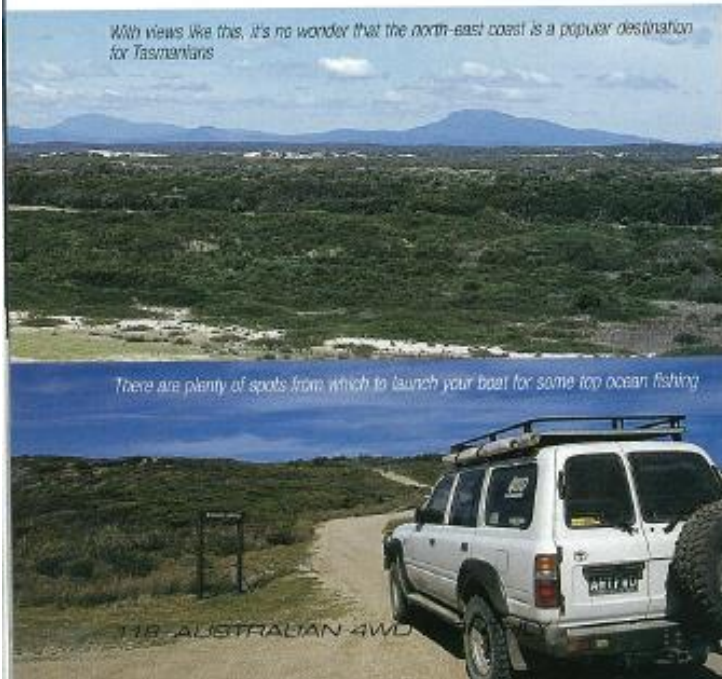
2000 Plus Information Shop, Bridport: (03) 6356 0280 or

www.bridport.tco.asn.au

Maps Used:

Tasmania North East 1:250,000 from the Tasmanian Government, *A Camping Guide to Tasmania* by Bolling Billy Publications, *The Visitors Guide to Tasmania* supplied by Tassie Tourism, *4WD Tracks in Tasmania* by Chris Boden and *Explore Tasmania* by Penguin. These maps and books are available from all good map shops including Melbourne Map Centre, (03) 9669 5472, or from the respective publishers.

With views like this, it's no wonder that the north-east coast is a popular destination for Tasmanians



There are plenty of spots from which to launch your boat for some top ocean fishing