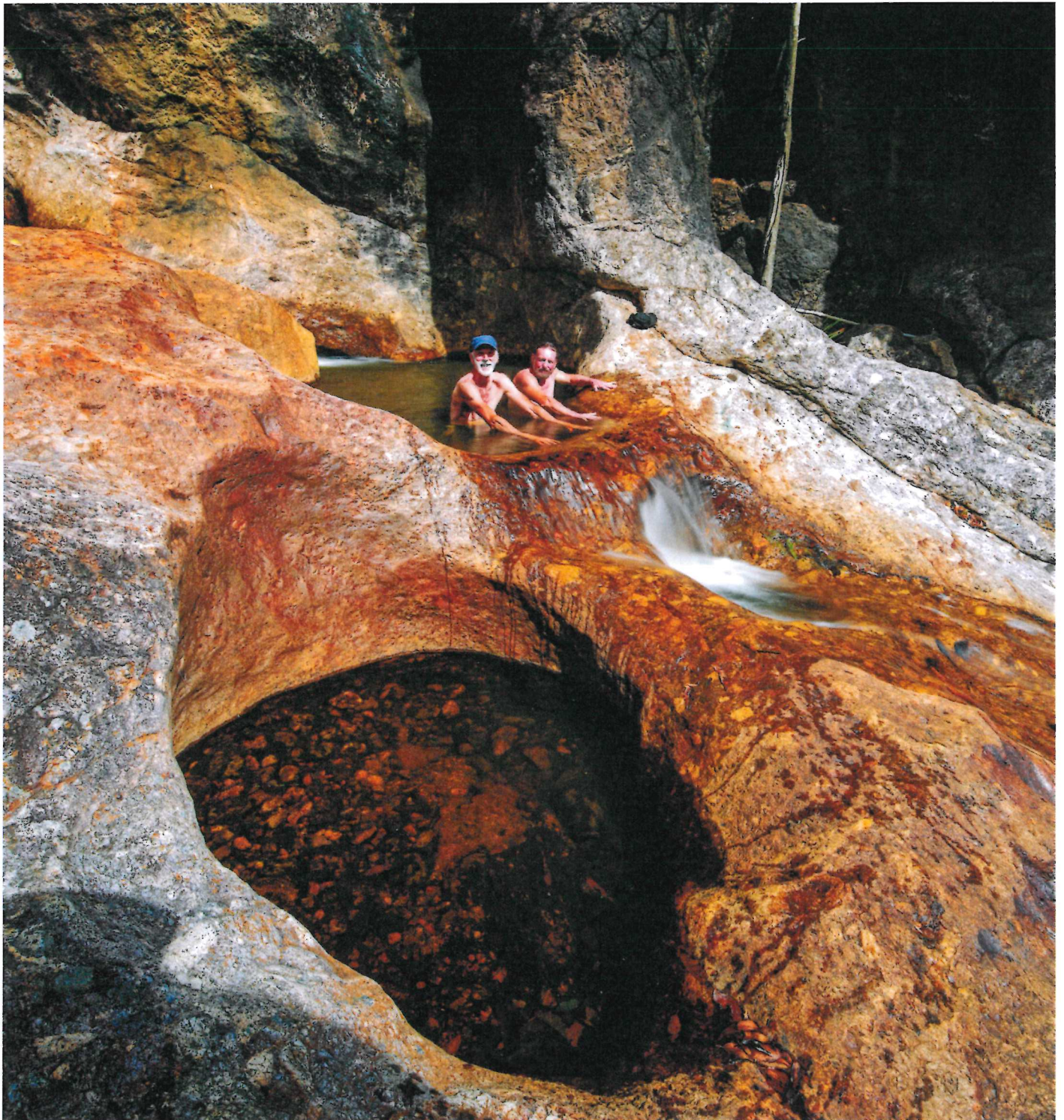


FortySouth

TASMANIA



\$18.50

ISSN 2652-5542



SPECTRE DETECTORS Sonia Strong
CHANGED UTTERLY Jillian Brannock
OVERLAND TRACK Shampa Sinha

LIGHTHOUSE KIDS Lisa Ikin
YOUTH PARLIAMENT Erin Coull
ABELS: WESTERN ARTHURS Rob Shaw

THEN AND NOW

LISA IKIN

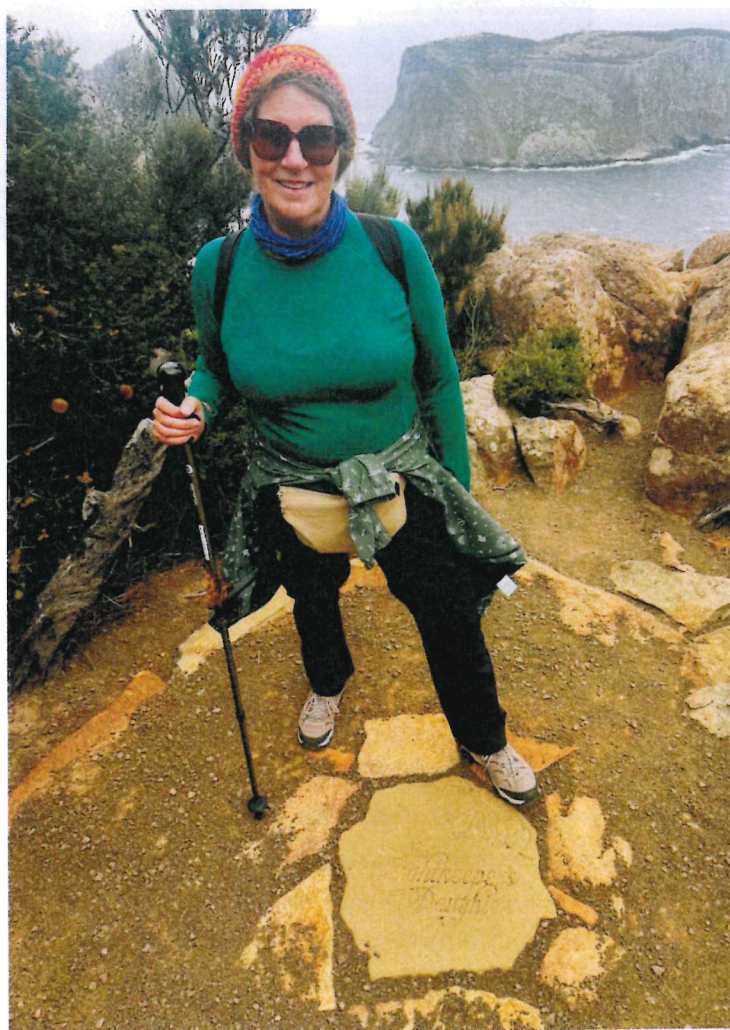
One Christmas day, I stepped out the front door to be lifted by the wind and carried, arms pinwheeling, across the grassy tussocks towards the edge of the 300m cliffs. Dad had to rugby tackle me back to earth. For six seconds, I knew what it was to fly.

Lighthouse kid

photographers LISA IKIN and DEIDRE IKIN

Sea spray pooled on my waterproof backpack cover as the Pennicott Wilderness catamaran aquaplaned from Port Arthur to Denham Cove and the beginning of the Three Capes Signature Walk. I recalled the last time I had pitched about on these seas, and it was not to wonder over sea caves or stop and watch fur seals frolic. Instead, I was most likely gripping the freshly anti-fouled railing on the rear deck of Bob Flack's cray boat, as I headed from Pirates Bay to my home on remote Tasman Island. We usually chose the rear deck because the cabin was cramped and funky.

Bob Flack's fishing boat churned out a heady mix of diesel fumes, cigarette smoke and freshly caught crayfish; a working boat that fished the Tasman Sea by day and delivered fortnightly



Lisa Ikin, Three Capes Signature Walk, 2025



Dad, me and little sister on the haulage way photo Deidre Ikin

supplies (and residents) to the wild cliff faces of Tasman Island. It was the 1970s.

My family was a lighthouse family, living on several remote islands off the Tasmanian coast. By 1976, the conversion of most lighthouses to automatic operation made us one of Australia's last lighthouse-keeping families. From the age of eight until my first year of high school, I was a lighthouse kid.

The Three Capes walk had been on my radar since it first opened in 2015, and before my father developed dodgy knees, it was a walk I had envisioned doing with him. As a kid, I had a unique outlook from Tasman Island of Cape Pillar and the Blade, a view that only a handful of people could lay claim to. I would wonder what it was like "over

there" (because I had a lot of time for wondering). It looked wild and inaccessible.

Dad tells me he took on a lightkeeper position in 1972 so we could bond as a family, my family being my dad, little sister and a relatively new stepmother. My birth mother had passed away suddenly when I was five, and this followed by two years of being cared for by my paternal grandmother in Launceston – and a new marriage for my dad.

Island life was going to bring us together! Certainly together in the sense that we only had each other, but as family therapy? The jury is still out.

...



Tasman Island flying fox photo Deidre Ikin

The first day of the Three Capes Signature Walk was warm and windless. Once the catamaran delivered us to Denham Cove, we enjoyed a refreshing swim before walking the 4.5km to the first hut. "Hut" falls a bit short as a description of our digs. My vision of "hut" correlates more with the basic shelter I've experienced on other hikes. This one, with architecturally designed sleeping quarters and kitchen area, satisfied my aesthete's eye.

Night one in a shared bunk room was balmy enough to kick my sleeping bag to the end of my memory foam mattress.

Day two was a steady climb through some of the most beautiful and diverse forest I have experienced. We wended our way atop sea

cliffs and climbed Arthur's Peak and Crescent Mountain before entering the eerily quiet cloud zone aptly named Cloud Forest, encountering tiger snakes, wallabies and antechinus (a marsupial mouse) en route.

Eleven kilometres later, just after lunch, we arrived at the second "hut", perched on a sea cliff with the same facilities as the previous one, but with the added luxury of an open-air solar heated bucket shower. We spent a relaxing afternoon on the deck before a slap-up meal of dehydrated pasta and Tasmanian freeze dried ice cream (more delicious than it sounds).

By the third day, I was eager to at last view Tasman Island from Cape Pillar. We woke to rain, wind and waves crashing against dolerite.

There were whitecaps. This was more like it. Up to now, the thought of skirting the sea cliffs on a calm day whilst mopping sweat from my brow wasn't making this trek down memory lane quite authentic enough. But to be clear, I was super excited to see Tasman Island no matter how regionally inappropriate the weather was.

Wild weather and wind were our constant companions on the island, with lighthouse keepers required to report the weather regularly over a 24-hour period. I loved tagging along to help Dad identify clouds and learn about wind direction before he relayed an unintelligible report that included terms such as "sou-sou-west" to the crackly recipient on the other end of the two-way radio. To this day, I can gaze skywards and identify a good cumulonimbus or cirrus.

The Roaring Forties, ever present off the coast of Tasmania, rocked the foundations of the lighthouse on more occasions than I can recall. The relentless wind had battered the only trees on the island into vertical submission, and one Christmas day, I stepped out the front door to be lifted by the wind and carried, arms pinwheeling, across the grassy tussocks towards the edge of the 300m cliffs. Dad had to rugby tackle me back to earth. For six seconds, I knew what it was to fly.

The wind on day three of the walk would not lift me off the ground, but I was weirdly reassured by the appearance of wild weather (my partner, not so much). Thrilled to leave our 12kg rucksacks behind, we set off from the hut with day packs, wearing the raincoat and pants that had taken up valuable pack space until now, and a sense of anticipation.

I'm not a big self-sharer, so I had only confided with a couple of people on the walk about my history on Tasman Island. They shared my excitement about seeing the island on day three and jokingly labelled me The Lightkeeper's Daughter after reading the story of the ill-fated Joyce in the Three Capes Track guide book. Let's just say that by the end of the day, it was common knowledge that I was indeed a lightkeeper's daughter.



Tasman Island, 2025 photo Lisa Ikin

I revelled in the wind whipping around my body, relieved not to be carrying a heavy pack. Once we reached the cliffs, one gust could have tipped us over the edge! Most of this part of the walk out to one of Australia's most southerly points was on boardwalks.



My first glimpse of Tasman Island when we reached the sea cliffs took my breath away.

The 29-metre lighthouse looked tiny and I could only just make out quarters No. 3 where we lived, a rambling red brick house tucked in beside the light, close enough that I would count the

seconds between flashes as I drifted to sleep. Wild weather meant we had spent many hours indoors taking correspondence lessons delivered by Bob Flack's boat every fortnight. Mathematics, among other things, became a battlefield for me and my stepmother. Reading was my escape; a crate load

of library books curated by the librarian in Hobart arrived from the mainland library each fortnight. We had no television.

Like the fishing boat, the lighthouse had its own aroma: fresh paint because someone was always applying a coat to something or other inside or outside the building; kerosene used to burn the mantle; and pipe tobacco or cigarette smoke. Every lighthouse I have ever entered since has that smell. The three lightkeepers were bound to shifts that took them through the night, their job to make sure the clockwork mechanism that turned the prisms didn't stop and the mantle remained aglow. Occasionally, another keeper would stay and play crib or chess to keep dad company and awake.

...

Each view of Tasman Island as we progressed along the cape track was closer and different. I climbed up onto the windy and slightly treacherous Blade alone, as my partner is not a fan of heights. The experience of looking out across the island from this familiar landmark was surreal. As a child, the Blade looked unconquerable, though I believe people hiked this area even while I lived on Tasman. It was my backdrop to a life of isolation and wonder.

As we neared the end of the Cape Pillar walk, my mind flooded with memories: a black-and-white photo of my sister and me in a magazine representing Australia's most remote Brownies; gatherings at the head lightkeeper's quarters for morning tea on mail day; occasions where the adults dressed up in their good threads and drank wine; watching the Sydney to Hobart yachts sail past; wondering how Santa Claus was going to deliver presents at Christmas; living on lentils, chickpeas and rice and occasionally masses of fresh crayfish, scallops and tuna; and exploring as far as

I could while fearing the hidden rock crevices that lurked beneath the undergrowth.

I also felt sadness for the child I was. Sad, because I was lonely, and we were fugitives in a way – there's nothing like a tiny island in the middle of the ocean for facing grief and escaping loss. Some might say it was character building.

...

Making our way to the last hut that penultimate day was tough, especially the final five kilometres with our heavy packs back on board. Everyone welcomed bed-time and the sleeping bag, rated to -5 degrees, finally came into its own. My zip was firmly closed and tucked under my chin.

The last day of the Three Capes Walk took us up into the rain forest, through massive tree ferns, past moss-covered logs and a beautiful array of fungi – so starkly different to what I ever imagined it would or could be.

Another respite from our packs as we headed out to Cape Huay, where we lunched and watched some brave climbers tackle the notorious Totem Pole. Seals basked like tiny slugs on the wet rocks and the sea, the colour of midnight, surged around the cliffs. I felt privileged to have experienced the walk, and seeing Tasman Island from the cliff's edge was a testament to a remarkable childhood experience ■

LISA IKIN was born in Launceston and educated by correspondence during a childhood spent largely on Tasmanian lighthouse islands. Later, she attended Scottsdale High School. She left Tasmania at 17 to seek her fortune on the mainland, and became a primary school teacher. She now lives in Western Australia where she works as a freelance writer, and returns to Tasmania every year to explore and to visit family.