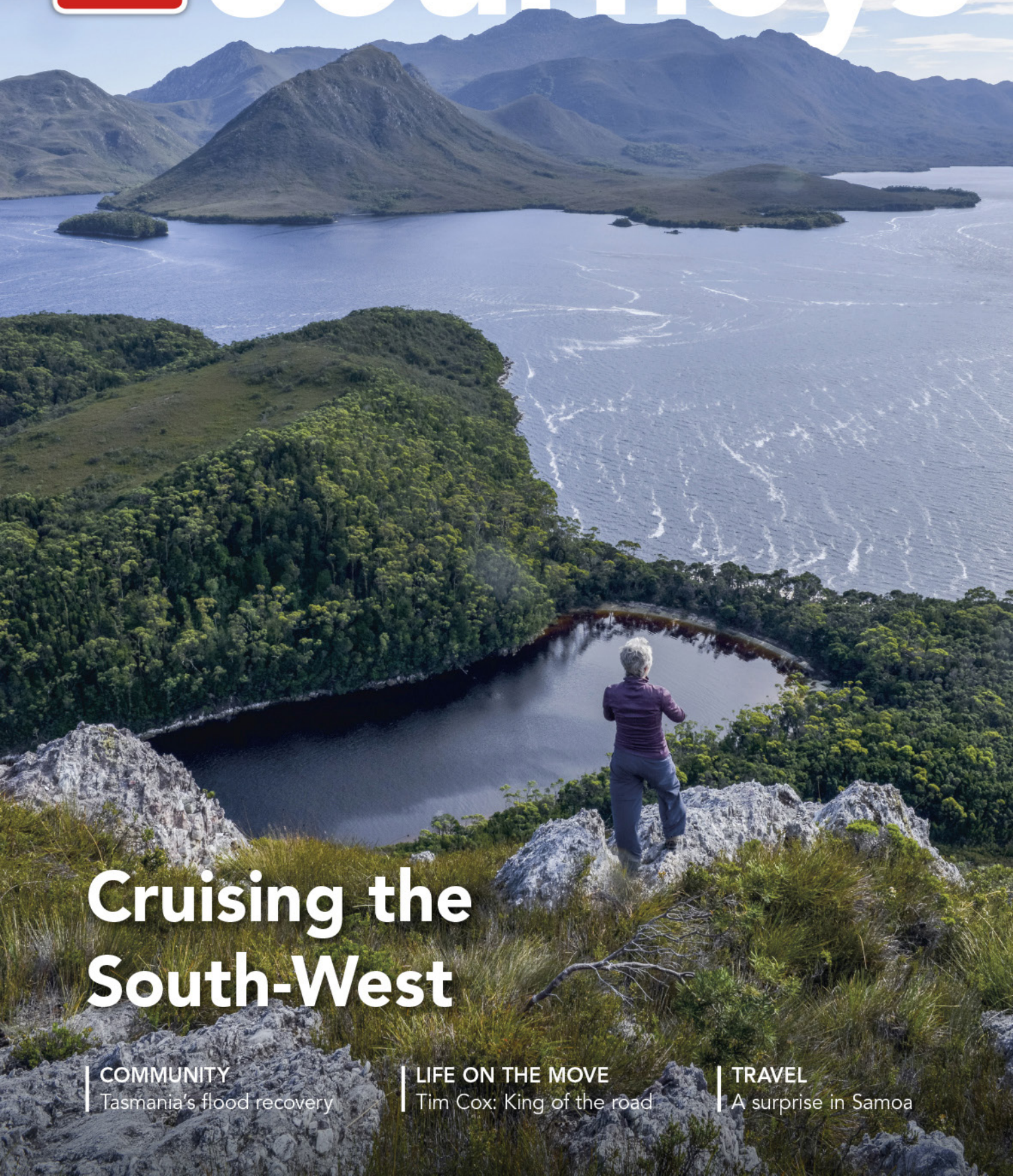




THE MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS OF THE RACT

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Cruising on the edge



Alice Hansen

Jetty at Clayton's Corner.

Alice Hansen takes a trip to the edge of civilisation and finds a wealth of history and wild landscapes to explore.

I stand there with my fully packed bag, all smiles at the airport. We're off to a place I hold loftily among my favourites on the world map. But the pilot just smiles at our small group and says 'you're not going anywhere'.

Deflated, we look at one another. We have drones, plump sailing bags, coats and faces dressed with the enthusiasm of a honeymoon couple bound for Bora Bora. We've even surfaced at 7am on a Sunday morning, yet we are grounded. I had an inkling of this when thunder clapped across Hobart's skies en route to Par Avion's Cambridge Airport base, but still held hope we'd touch down in South-West Tasmania later that morning. Simply because I really wanted to go, I'd done my best to block out what was clearly happening overhead.

It is weeks before we make it out there. Days pass, weather patterns belt through and surging swells mean no one can come or go.

It's the nature of the place. It's why I love it – a far-flung corner of the planet where no roads lead in. Only those willing to venture by air, sea or determined legs can reach Melaleuca.

Nearly a month later, on a perfectly crisp autumn morning, our promised trip arrives. This time I've whisked my father along for the ride, a fitting surprise 70th birthday sojourn. His eyes grow wide as we fly past Federation Peak and I see this landscape casting its spell on him, as it did me three years ago. Soon we'll be descending low over Bathurst Harbour, some three times the size of Sydney Harbour and infinitely more silent and remote.

Touching down on the gravel strip of 'Melaleuca International' feels like home, despite these impenetrable wilds being so unforgiving, so unwelcoming. Fortunately we're in hospitable company – skipper and owner of Tasmanian Boat Charters' *Odalisque* Pieter Van Der Woude is in the plane seat behind us. We're about to



ABOVE, TOP TO BOTTOM: Water-filled 'Scamp' moored at Deny King's former home; Open air boat shed at Deny King's; A quick escape route for visiting quolls at Clyde and Win Clayton's former home.

board his 20m luxury vessel, purpose-built to tackle a coastline carved by south-westerly storms. Our mission is to touch down in Melaleuca and make the nine-hour voyage from Bathurst Harbour to Hobart aboard Tasmania's latest eco-adventure.

Pieter is a former ab diver who's dipped below the surface of most of the off-shore islands we pass. He has a story for every sea cave, can spot a white-bellied sea eagle from seemingly three ks away and reels off island names like his own children's. That said, Big Caroline and Flat Witch aren't the most endearing of names.

Before we settle in for the evening, we have a task. Pieter has wooed a Hobart wine bar with talk of the pure South-West water he can collect, spilling over aforementioned ancient rocks. It's anticipated to slip down suitably well with a Tassie single malt. We pull our dinghy in snug to the cascading tannin-stained flow.

'Well I better try some,' quips Pieter's daughter Alice, leaning in close. She retreats not only with a mouthful but an entire face bathed in Roaring Forties-swept waters, and a refreshed smile to match.



Chris Crierar

That night we bunker down in Bramble Cove – the unlikely corner of the Earth to find Moo Brew to be flowing on tap. Not only is one of Tassie's most popular brews at the ready, but smooth Tasmanian cheeses and fresh produce surface. The barbie is fired up on the back deck and although some drink local Pinot long into the star-lit night, I retreat to my maritime bed spruced with a Spotted Quoll pillow from a local Launceston designer.

Our early rise rewards us with a pink-glowing sky as we motor past the Breaksea Islands with their wind-pruned flora. It's now just us and the Southern Ocean, next landfall to the south – Antarctica. I struggle to fathom the courage of Aboriginal women who dove for shellfish and crays in these heaving swells some 35,000 years before us. With just tea-tree and bark dome huts as refuge, the Needwunnee people hunted seals from bark canoes off the Maatsuyker Island group.

The coast is a spectacle of unchanged majesty – wave-cut rock formations, gulches, petite inlets, sweeping bays and sand dunes a



ABOVE: Big Caroline Rock outside the Port Davey headland.
RIGHT: *Odalisque* skipper Pieter Van Der Woude pours a Moo Brew for his guests.

few thousand years in the making. To the early French explorers, their diaries read that this was the world's end. Few places on the planet look visually near-identical to the time when first sighted.

With sooty oyster catchers and dolphins as our drop-in visitors, we hear tales of Maatsuyker's early days when it took three families to keep the lighthouse beam aglow, courtesy of whale oil in the 1800s. We fast forward to the 1970s when 'Jane', determined to kick a rumoured drug addiction, is delivered to far-flung De Witt Island by a fisherman to spend a year in isolation.

For us, though, we're passing through. We're merely visitors to this wild outpost. We hug our way round South East Cape, Australia's southern-most tip, bound for Hobart Town. We'll never know the weeks, months, years of hardship withstood by hardy souls who called the South-West home – Aboriginals, explorers, legendary bushmen like Deny King, or a lone man determined for the South-West to become a thriving Jewish settlement. But they are tales for another journey.



ODALISQUE

What: Tasmanian Boat Charters offer tours in the South-West from February to May each year. The *Odalisque* is based in Hobart for the remainder of the year, and available for charter. Popular routes include Tasmania's East Coast, Bruny Island and the Channel.

Visit: www.tasmanianboatcharters.com.au



Alice Hansen was a guest of Tasmanian Boat Charters.