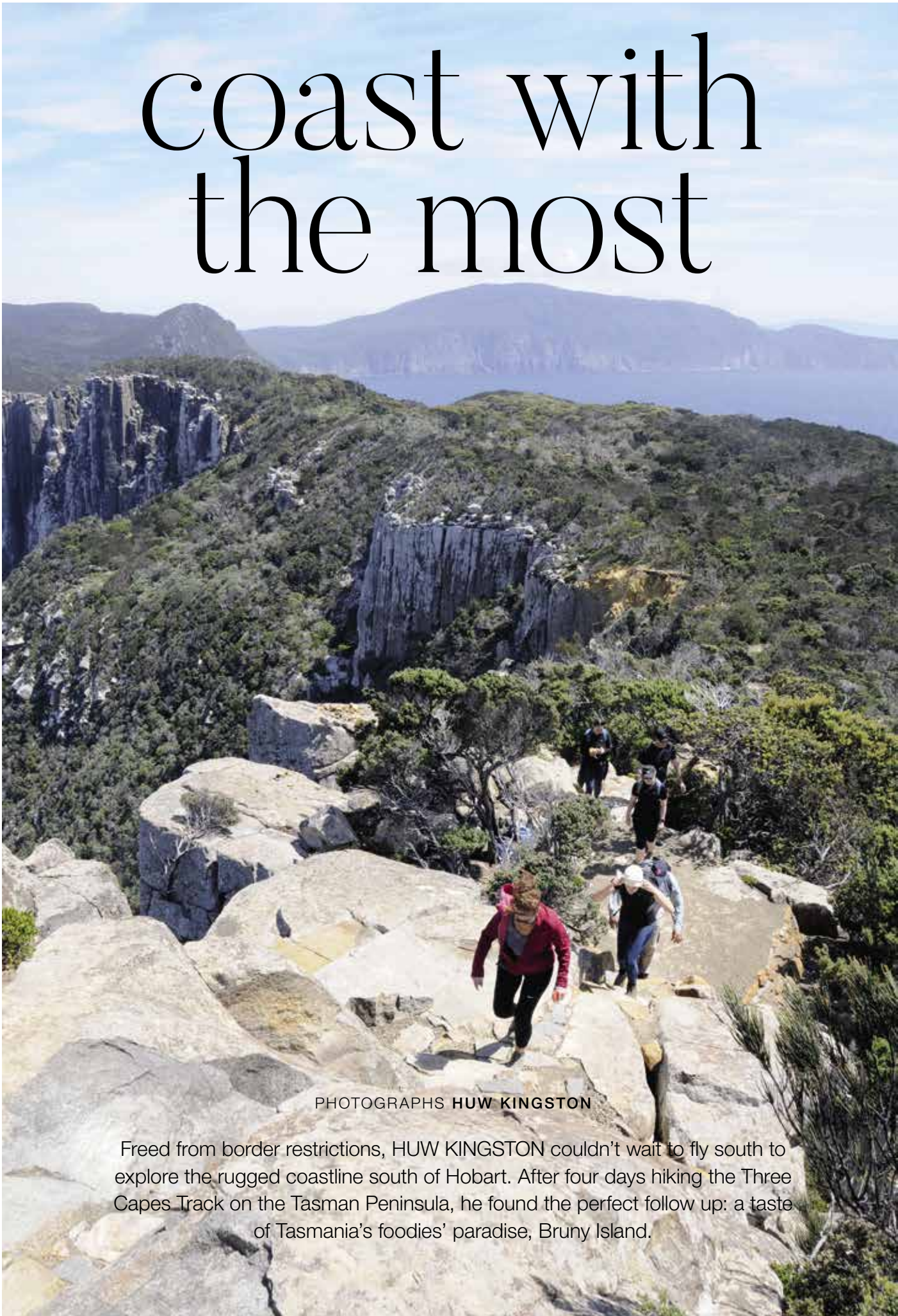


coast with the most



PHOTOGRAPHS **HUW KINGSTON**

Freed from border restrictions, HUW KINGSTON couldn't wait to fly south to explore the rugged coastline south of Hobart. After four days hiking the Three Capes Track on the Tasman Peninsula, he found the perfect follow up: a taste of Tasmania's foodies' paradise, Bruny Island.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP DECKCHAIRS ON THE EDGE OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN, MUNRO HUT; WENDY KINGSTON WITH THE BLADE AND TASMAN ISLAND BEHIND; SURVEYORS HUT; FIRST STEP ON THE THREE CAPES TRACK. **OPPOSITE PAGE** HEADING UP THE BLADE.

I BALANCE ON TOP OF THE BLADE, trying to avoid being blown off the dolerite block of rock marking the summit. Tasman Island, its 30 metre lighthouse steadfast in the wind, is across a narrow strait. The sea, 300 metres below the light and my feet, whips up and whizzes past.

Lighthouse keepers are romanticised the world over but, in reality, they had the toughest of jobs. In Tasmania in the early 1900s, keepers and their wives at remote light stations were required to have all their teeth removed to reduce the chance of septicaemia. Romantic stuff.

The Blade, a narrow ridge of dolerite, the most southerly point of the Tasman Peninsula, sits near the end of Cape Pillar on day three of the Three Capes Track. Once the preserve of hardy bushwalkers and climbers, this track is so well graded as to be accessible by anyone with a modicum of fitness, a willingness to carry a few days' worth of food and a desire to view some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in Australia.

Each day a cruise boat from Port Arthur nudges onto the sand of Denman Cove and, like a landing craft, disgorges a platoon of 48 hikers; one for each of the 48 kilometres of the trail. Funky, spacious huts wait for you at the end of each

day. Surveyors, Munro and Retakunna huts provide kitchens, comfortable mattresses, yoga mats, deckchairs, a well-stocked library, a resident ranger and stunning views. You provide food, utensils and sleeping bag.

A near 100-page book entertains with stories on the Indigenous and European history, flora, fauna and more. Thirty unique, sculptured seats along the way provide plenty of resting points to read them.

The track often passes dizzyingly close to precipitous cliff edges. No safety barriers here, an often far too prevalent intrusion. Hang on to hats and your inclination to peer too close into the depths.

The fourth and final day includes a side trip to Cape Huay. The hundreds of steps will reward those who take stairs rather than lifts. From an eyrie at the end of the cape, you look down on to the Totem Pole, a pencil thin sea stack, much favoured by rock climbers, rising from the water between Huay and the Candlestick, a much bulkier stack.

A final few kilometres deposit you onto the sands of sparkling Fortescue Bay and a celebration, perhaps, with a dip in the Southern Ocean.



THE TOTEM POLE, CAPE HUAY; JOE, CHEESEMAKER AT BRUNY ISLAND CHEESE CO; THE BRUNY ISLAND BREAD FRIDGE.

A tour boat had deposited us to start the Three Capes Walk on the Tasman Peninsula and it was another craft, a ferry, that took us on the 15 minute hop across to Bruny Island from Kettering, a short drive south of Hobart. Seventy kilometres long, the beaches, walks and cliff scenery of Bruny are the equal of the Tasman Peninsula. And, with a range of locally produced food and drink a few rungs above what we'd carried on our walk, it proved a perfect place to enjoy a few days.

From our accommodation at Free Spirit Pods we strolled along the oyster-strewn shore as a pair of sea eagles soared above our heads. Free spirits indeed. We walked along to the old Bruny Island Quarantine Station. The juxtaposition in 2020 was stark as, without restriction, we explored a place that a century ago, during the Spanish Flu pandemic, was full of 'returned travellers'.

A hand-written sign perched on the grass simply said 'Coffee'. Intrigued, I wandered into a building that had no other indication as to what might be inside. David, Venezuelan by birth, surfer by nature, and sound engineer by profession, was pouring his last coffee of the day.

Cloudy Bay, on the southern end of Bruny, had been home for nearly a decade but COVID-19 had halted a life following music festivals and waves. With little work and a community in need of a place to commune, David opened a cafe. Laura, the owner of the old Lunawanna General Store, offered not only a location, but a range of vegan pies guaranteed to tempt even the most ardent meat lover to consider flirting with a new relationship.

Like many during this pandemic, David had reassessed his life. "I get to see my wife, children and community every day. I don't see me going back to my old ways."

Another sign, 'Bread', was next to tempt inspection on the roadside. Inside an old, unplugged fridge we found warm, freshly baked sourdough. After popping some cash in the freezer, we grabbed a loaf before heading off on a boat tour from Adventure Bay. While I felt a little guilty not being in my sea kayak, particularly departing from a place with such a name, the

massive dolerite cliffs, the colonies of fur seals and the banter of the skipper made the trip down the east coast very worthwhile.

Bruny Island Cheese, Brewery and Bakery is perhaps the most visible of Bruny's producers. We sampled a tasting paddle of beers with a platter of cheese and bread. They produce some of the few raw milk cheeses in Australia with a taste and aroma that took me right back to hiking the high European Alps; shepherds holding out great wedges of delicious delight.

Despite still having half a loaf from the Bread Fridge on the go, how could the offer of a loaf straight from the wood-fired oven be refused? With an infectious grin and enthusiastic manner, baking wizard Vicki came to Tasmania in the early 1980s to taste another impressive paddle – a journey down the Franklin River. Vicki never left the island and headed down that wild river again in 2019 celebrating her daughter's 21st birthday. I share her enthusiasm, having come under the spell of the Franklin 35 years ago, indeed naming my Bundanoon house The Irenabyss, a gorge on the river.

The Bruny Island moniker has understandably been appropriated by most food groups: Bruny Island Wines, Bruny Island Cider and the sweetness of Bruny Island Honey and the Bruny Island Chocolate Company among them. The latter is run by a fifth generation Tasmanian pastry chef whose partner is a whisky producing dentist. Sticking a finger up to such naming, the oysters from Get Shucked are the plumpest I've seen or tasted.

Many explorers and adventurers have come to Bruny: Abel Tasman, James Cook, Bruni D'Entrecasteaux and William Blish included. At Dennes Point, the northernmost tip of the island, is the Jetty Cafe. Here, over fine pizzas from an oven built during the pandemic lockdown, I caught up with Justin Jones, who recently moved to the island. In 2008 Justin and James Castrission (known as Cas and Jonesy) became the first people to kayak from Australia to New Zealand. Bruny still attracts adventurers, but it undoubtedly has attractions for all. **HL**

Huw Kingston was a guest of Tourism Tasmania.

