

The Thylacine

The Florentine Valley has played a role in one of Tasmania's most shameful chapters—the extinction of the thylacine.

The thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus* or Tasmanian Tiger) was the largest marsupial carnivore, a nocturnal hunter. The 'doe' carried up to four cubs in her pouch. Colonists blamed the thylacines for killing sheep, and the government paid 2184 one-pound bounties for thylacines killed between 1888 and 1909.

On 7 September 1936, the last captive thylacine died in a Hobart zoo. There has been no irrefutable evidence of the thylacine's existence since. In September 1986, it was declared extinct.

That last captive thylacine, which has featured in famous footage and photos, was captured in the Florentine Valley. Details are unconfirmed, but it seems that it was a young cub captured along with its mother and two siblings in 1924 by Walter Mullins. They were taken to the railhead at Fitzgerald (just east of Maydena) and delivered to the Beaumaris Zoo for the princely sum of 55 pounds.

Another snarer, Elias Churchill, caught eight thylacines in the Florentine area in the 1920s and 1930s. He saw many more in the area. But that was before most of the Florentine was destroyed for newsprint, woodchips and sawlogs. Now logging is penetrating the pristine Upper Florentine, where the thylacine once roamed.

How you can help

- Write a letter to the Prime Minister urging him to protect threatened oldgrowth forests in Tasmania, including the Upper Florentine. Arrange for your family and friends to write letters.

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

- Visit the Upper Florentine and other threatened Tasmanian forests and tell your friends and family about it. Spread the word about Tasmania's forests and how people can help.
- Join The Wilderness Society—call 1800 030 641 for details.
- Make tax-deductible donations to The Wilderness Society Inc. Post to Tasmanian Forests Campaign, The Wilderness Society, 130 Davey St, Hobart 7000. Include your name and address.
- Shop at The Wilderness Shop at Salamanca, Hobart. Profits go to the campaign to protect Tasmania's oldgrowth forests.
- Contact your local member of Parliament and express your concern.
- Write Letters to the Editor of Tasmanian and interstate newspapers.
- Volunteer your skills and time to The Wilderness Society or one of the local community organisations campaigning for forest protection.

The Wilderness Society (Tasmania) Inc
130 Davey St, Hobart TAS 7000
(03) 6224 1550
tasmania@wilderness.org.au
www.wilderness.org.au

UPPER FLORENTINE



Self-Drive and Walking Guide

February 2008



The Upper Florentine

The Upper Florentine Valley lies 80 km west of Hobart (100 km by road) in the rugged and wet western part of the state. It is an intrinsic part of Tasmania's South-West wilderness—one of the greatest temperate wilderness areas on Earth.

The upper reaches of the Florentine are surrounded by the spectacular mountains of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The valley floor is home to giant trees, rainforest and moorlands as well as outcropping limestone. This limestone is riddled with caves containing ancient Aboriginal heritage as well as the bones of extinct mega-marsupials.

The area also contains a rich European heritage. The Timbs Track joins the Adamsfield Track to take you along a former packhorse trail to the now deserted mining settlement of Adamsfield and the remote homestead of Gordonvale.

There are a number of historical huts in the Upper Florentine. Churchill's Hut is an excellent example of an old snarer's hut.

Today, the Upper Florentine is visited by thousands of people on their way to Lake Pedder. From the Gordon River Road, people can walk through a spectacular part of the Upper Florentine en route to well-known peaks and lakes within the World Heritage Area. Lookouts on the road provide impressive views across a landscape of jagged quartzite mountains and thick forests.

World Heritage under threat

Unfortunately, the Upper Florentine is threatened by logging. The valley as a whole once contained large tracts of the tallest hardwood trees on Earth.

The vast majority of these have already been destroyed by logging operations since the early 1950s. Now only the upper regions of the valley remain intact. Forestry Tasmania plans to drive new logging roads further south, into the Upper Florentine, so that the tall-eucalypt forests of the valley can be exploited for sawlogs and woodchips. The proposed logging will destroy the World Heritage values of the area.

Logging plans

Oldgrowth forest was recently clearfelled in coupe FO42F, less than a hundred metres from the historic Churchill's Hut. Explosives were used to blow up giant trees. Further south, the first few hundred metres of seven kilometres of new logging roads have been completed.

These roads are paid for with public money and the logging is heavily subsidised by taxpayer handouts to the logging industry. 'Modified clearfell' is a new technique used to log oldgrowth forest that Forestry Tasmania claim is 'selective logging'. In reality, large swathes of forest are still clearfelled, to be burnt and artificially seeded to regrow a eucalypt forest.

Timbs Track is immediately adjacent to coupe FO44A, currently scheduled for logging in 2007–08. Forestry Tasmania says this forest will be logged 'for specialty timbers'. But over 70% of timber will go directly for woodchips, with only about 9% being considered specialty timber. Worse still, large amounts of usable timber will be burnt in the deliberate forestry burn that follows the logging.

Protection

The Upper Florentine is one of many threatened forests of World Heritage value in Tasmania. Others are in the Weld, Styx, Huon, Picton, Navarre, Derwent and Mersey catchments, and on the Great Western Tiers and Mt Wedge. They are all areas with World Heritage values threatened by logging.

The Wilderness Society is calling for all of these areas to be added to the adjacent Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and national-park system. In the Upper Florentine, this addition would cover approximately 6000 hectares (60 square kilometres).

Forests and climate change

Tasmania's forests are some of the most 'carbon-dense' in the world. Ancient forests in the Styx, Florentine, and Weld valleys keep millions of tonnes of dangerous carbon safely stored in the trees and soil. When these forests are logged, much of that carbon is released into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change and increasing the risk of serious drought and extreme fire conditions.

Protecting forests from logging is one of the cheapest and quickest ways we can help stop dangerous climate change. Last year the federal government announced that it was spending \$200 million to help stop deforestation in South East Asia—a very welcome initiative.

But in Tasmania, these ancient carbon stores are suffering from destructive logging and burning. This is occurring at taxpayers' expense, with over \$20 million of taxpayers' funds paying for new roads and logging in Tasmanian oldgrowth forests.

1. How to get there

From Hobart, travel through New Norfolk and on to Maydena via Bushy Park, Westerway and past Mt Field National Park. When you reach Maydena (90 km from Hobart, last petrol) set your odometer to zero.

Continue through Maydena on the Gordon River Road. You will soon pass a sign indicating the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Crossing the Humboldt Divide you will be greeted by a vista of bare, jagged mountains looming above a valley of primeval forests. These are the threatened forests of the Upper Florentine.

2. Thumbs Lookout (17.7 km from Maydena)

Just down the hill from the Humboldt Divide, park on the right hand side of the road and follow the short rock-lined pathway to the Thumbs Lookout. From here you get an overview of the threatened forests of the Upper Florentine Valley, and the surrounding alpine peaks, including the spectacular Thumbs Range.

3. Timbs Track carpark (21 km from Maydena)

Keep driving along Gordon River Road until you re-enter forest. On the right, 3.3 km from the Thumbs Lookout, is a signposted car park and the start of Timbs Track. The track, although very clear and well maintained, does have some muddy patches and there is no reliable water supply unless you are planning on walking as far as the Florentine River (approx. 1.5 hrs plus).

Timbs Track provides access to visitor points 5 to 8 described here.

4. Timbs Track

From the car park, walk along Timbs Track and enter the mixed wet forests of the Upper Florentine Valley. Follow Timbs Track through a primeval forest of giant stringybarks with a rainforest understorey of ancient myrtles and sassafras.

Timbs Track continues to the Tiger Valley Lookout and on to the Florentine River. As you walk along the track you will experience changing geology and ecology as you move from mixed wet forests and rainforest up onto a low quartzite ridge and into buttongrass and heathland. In spring and summer the wildflowers here are spectacular.

Along the way you will pass the following two side trip options.

5. Twisted Sister (approx. 15 mins return from Timbs Track)

After about five minutes walk along Timbs Track, you will see pink tape and a sign on your left. This indicates a track (approx ten minutes or 250 m) that runs through the forest and makes a loop around the base of a giant tree called Twisted Sister. The reason for the name will become obvious when you find the tree!

6. Coupe Loop (50 minutes return from carpark)

A further ten minutes along Timbs Track, you will see another track marked with pink tape. This is a loop track which curls back onto Timbs Track after making its way through forest typical of the area—full of towering eucalypts, giant myrtles and fantastic tree ferns.

7. Tiger Valley Lookout (1 hour from carpark)

The Tiger Valley Lookout was built by volunteers concerned about the proposed logging of the Upper

Florentine. The wood was milled from a eucalypt log left as waste from forestry operations in the Florentine.

From the Tiger Valley Lookout you can see the surrounding peaks, including the Thumbs, Mount Wright, Tiger Range, Mount Field West, Tim Shea, the Needles, Mount Mueller and the Sawback Range.

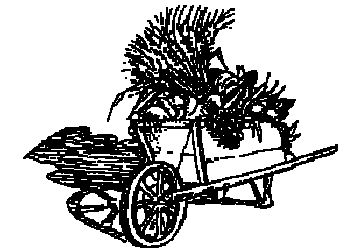
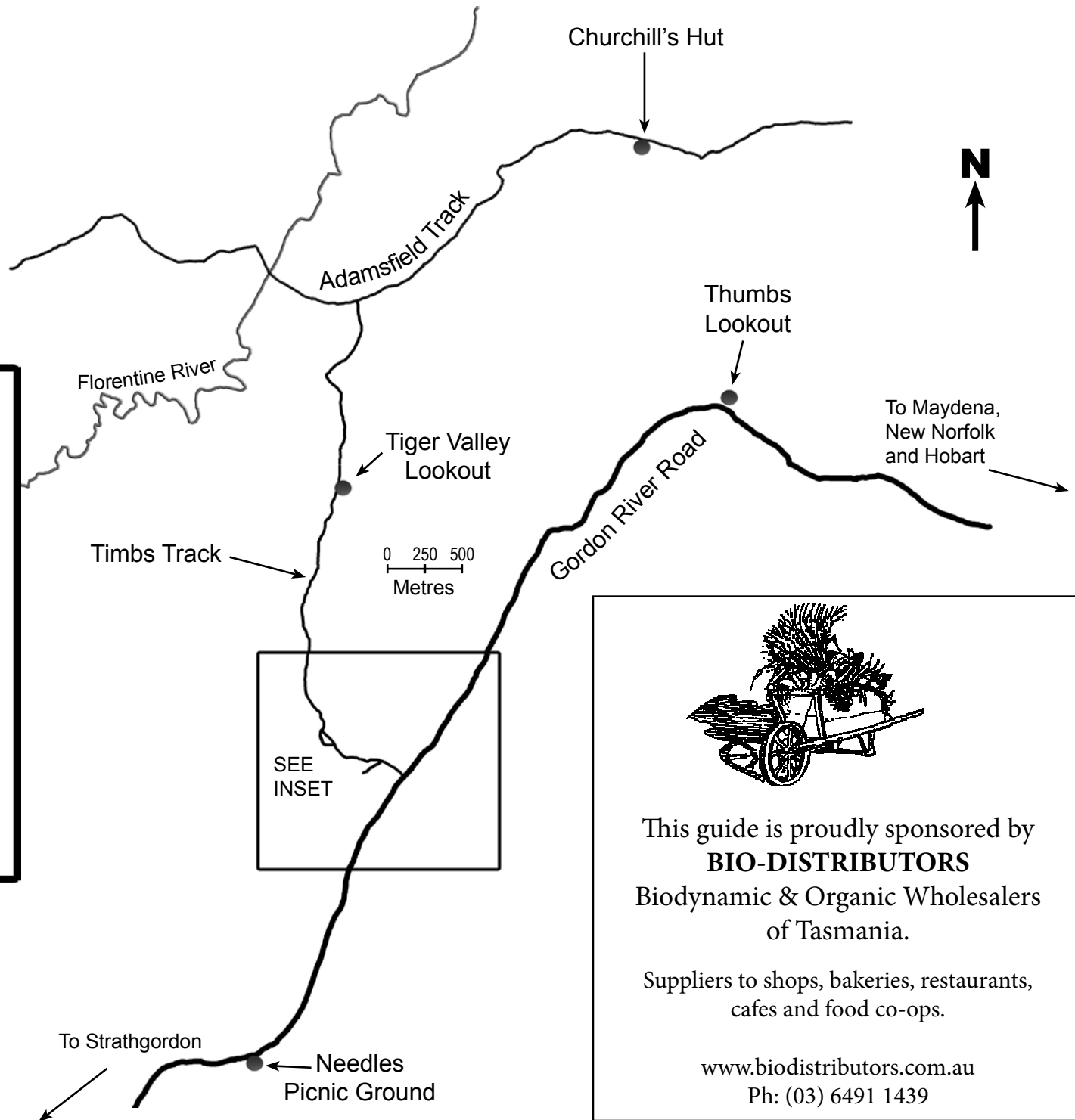
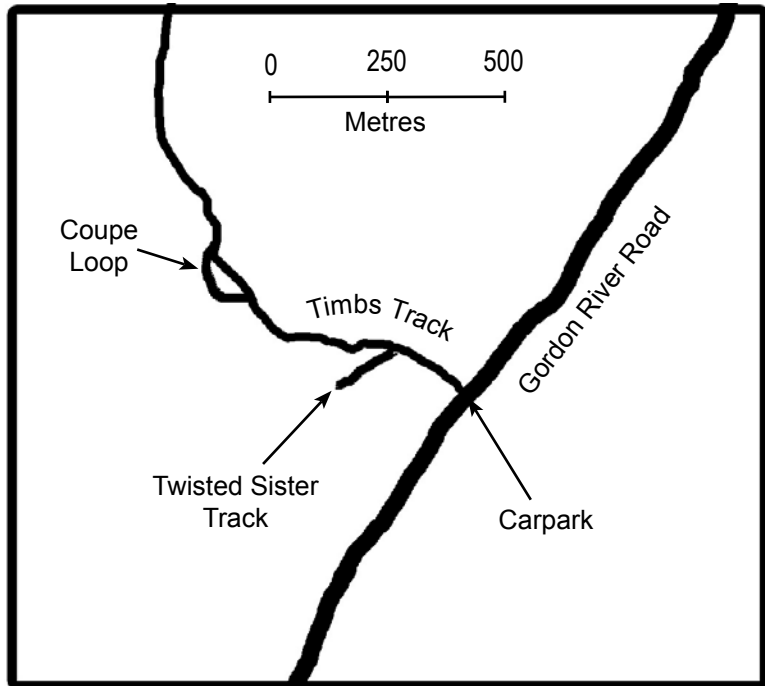
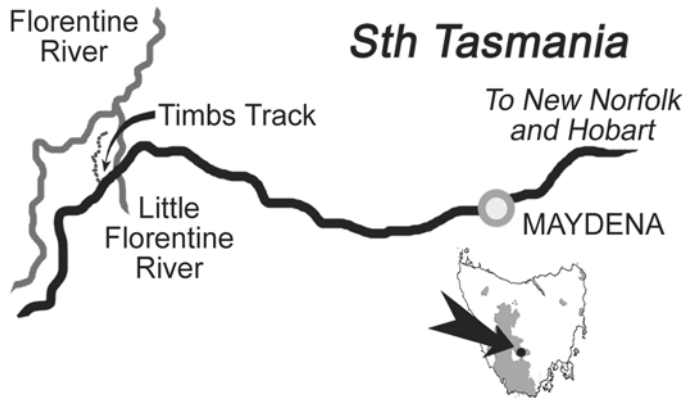
8. Florentine River (40 mins from the lookout)

From the lookout, you can walk on to the Florentine River. At the river there are a couple of decaying huts, and a clear mossy area (perfect for a picnic).

Important information

- *Bring food, water, sunhat, raincoat and stout shoes.*
- *There are no built toilets within the forest areas described in this leaflet. The most convenient toilet facilities are located in Maydena or at the Needles Picnic Ground.*
- *Gordon River Road is a sealed road, however the Upper Florentine is a remote area out of mobile phone range.*
- *Ensure you have a spare tyre and jack.*
- *Drive slowly at night and at dusk to spare wildlife.*
- *Beware of log trucks, especially if you are driving on a weekday.*

Bushfire Warning: please do not light campfires or smoke cigarettes while in the forest. It is not advisable to visit the forest on days of total fire ban.



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DISCLAIMER: Visitors to this area should be aware that natural hazards occur within Tasmania's forest environments. The Wilderness Society accepts no liability for any injury or damage resulting from such hazards.