



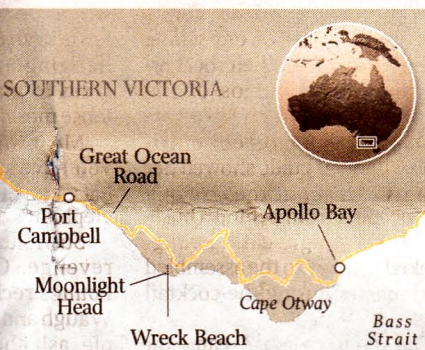
miraculous survival

TOURISM VICTORIA/PAOLI SMITH

# he beaches



TOURISM VICTORIA/ROBERT BLACKBURN



y wave  
ge and  
pulling  
startled  
le.  
rst sign  
has not  
s popu-  
famous  
mpbell,  
es loom  
f Atlan-  
ipwreck  
rgotten

e 19th-  
stline, I  
Steps,  
g Apost-  
og, feel  
uch.  
metres  
another  
hedrals  
s apart.  
ffs, I can

see that the shipwrecks here must have been a vision of hell.

"Oh, it's a bastard of a coastline," grins professional shipwreck guide Mark Brack when I meet him above the savage fingers of Loch Ard Gorge, long narrow inlets where the sea explodes with terrific force. A stocky force of nature himself, Brack was raised at the Cape Otway Lighthouse in the 1950s as the youngest son of the keeper.

Now he is shooting one anecdote after another at me from his personal historic vault as if time itself is running out. "The coastline west of Melbourne first became a death trap in the 1850s," Brack explains, "when Australia's gold rushes were bringing over 100 ships a day from Britain, racing past this point with their holds full of hopeful prospectors."

Captains were paid for speed despite the risk, since every ship

had to thread the needle — navigate a narrow 80km channel between the Bass Strait islands and the menacing sea stacks. A half-degree of error on the chronometer would spell disaster and in fact about 200 ships were wrecked here in the 19th century. Even so, there are photographs of ships rammed on to the rocks with full complements of sail.

"It was completely, bloody irresponsible," Brack rants as if he's in a maritime court. "Not that the enterprising locals minded, of course. Kids used to pray there'd be another shipwreck, so dad would find some tobacco to sell."

Of all the tragedies here, the wreck of the Loch Ard remains the most riveting. Miraculously, two of the 54 passengers survived the murderous waves. Cabin boy Tom Pearce was tossed on to the only patch of sand in the gorge, a one in a thousand chance. Hearing the cries of Eva Carmichael, who was clinging to a chicken coop, he jumped back into the water to rescue her, then scaled the terrifying cliffs to find help at a nearby farm.

The tabloids of the day pounced on the boy-saves-girl story and demanded the two be married forthwith. But they went their separate ways; Pearce actually returned to a life at sea.

"The silly bugger," chortles Brack. "And get this... he survived two more shipwrecks." Then, apparently, Pearce retired. He must have figured: three times lucky.

## Checklist

The designated Shipwreck Coast runs for about 180km between Cape Otway and Port Fairy. The easiest way to get into the wilder corners of the coast is to hike part of the Great Ocean Walk, opened in 2006. Campers can do the whole length in six days, but an ideal day hike is between Blanket Bay and Parker Hill Bay, which passes (at low tide) the remains of shipwreck Eric the Red.

Mark Brack does half-day guided trips with small groups. More: (03) 5237 9272; msbrack@bigpond.com. Brack can also guide you to Wreck Beach to visit the remains of the Fiji and Marie Gabrielle. • shipwreckcoast.com

## STATE OF PLAY

# Picture perfect in the Flinders

Take up a brush and learn how to capture rugged South Australian landscapes on canvas

CARLA CARUSO

WEARING white to an outdoor art class probably isn't the best of moves.

So it's hard to blame anyone but myself when a gust of wind sees my freshly painted canvas land picture-first on my top, leaving a colourful imprint. Besides, my pale T-shirt's new painterly look could perhaps be the best piece of art I've created all day.

I've joined the inaugural art escape tour at Rawnley Park Station in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, curious to see if there's an inner Monet lurking (so far, I've been thoroughly disappointed). The tours are suitable for everyone from beginners to experienced artists and cover landscape sketching and painting.

The outdoor class reminds me a little of an episode with an art-class theme from the television series *Midsomer Murders*. But there's neither lush English countryside nor corpses here: just alive-and-biting bull ants and flies. Plus, enough red dust to coat the nostrils. (Blissfully though, there's no mobile phone or internet coverage either.)

Fellow amateur artists are dotted about the dry-grassed landscape, stealing shade under the few trees. The ruggedly beautiful mountainous ranges provide plenty of artistic inspiration.

Weaving his way among the students is Gilbert Dashorst — one of the nation's last full-time botanical artists — wearing a trademark Hawaiian shirt. Apparently, his year-round wardrobe consists of such shirts and khaki shorts even when visiting Europe in winter. He's proud of his Dutch heritage and cheerily uses any excuse to drop anecdotes about his countrymen in conversation as well as proffering Dutch ginger biscuits for morning tea.

Dashorst works full-time at the State Herbarium in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, illustrating plant material for scientific publications. So his weekend art tours are a chance to get out into nature, away from the precision of the science world, and mingle

with like-minded souls. He's also the co-author of *Plants of the Adelaide Plains & Hills*.

He suddenly pauses mid-weaving to peer over my shoulder, his brow furrowed. I'm not sure whether the state of my T-shirt or my attempt at capturing a fallen log in acrylic is the cause of his perplexity. But he makes a few murmurs and then politely asks: "May I?" I hand him my canvas and paintbrush and, with a few strokes, he's transformed my sky into a blue vision with swirling clouds.

As Dashorst works, I ask him what he hopes art hobbyists will take away from the new tours. "First, their own picture," he replies with a smile. "And hopefully, say, five to 10 years down the

**The ruggedly beautiful mountainous ranges provide plenty of artistic inspiration**

track, they will see that picture and it will bring back memories of their trip." (I also have my paint-spattered top for the latter.)

Dashorst moves on and, a few moments later, a fellow art student wanders past and glances at my painting. "Brilliant sky," she observes. I don't have the heart to tell her that it's the only part of the artwork that isn't mine.

Carla Caruso and James Elsbey were guests of Rawnley Park.

## Checklist

Rawnley Park Station is 35km north of Hawker in the Flinders Ranges (about 4.5 hours' drive north of Adelaide). The Art Escape tours cost \$880 a person, twin-share, including two nights' accommodation in a one-bedroom villa, most meals, art classes and materials. More: (08) 8648 0030; rawnsleypark.com.au.



JAMES ELSBEY

Gilbert Dashorst and Carla Caruso at Rawnley Park