



# Coasting along

Gourmet meals, impressive scenery –  
LYNN COLE reports on a different sort of walking tour,  
far removed from baked beans and sleeping rough

*Above, the Twelve Apostles, a landmark on the Victorian coast*





**W**ANTED: personable young couple to go bushwalking, canoeing, cycling and horseriding in a variety of beautiful locations. Must enjoy fabulous food and a relaxed, healthy lifestyle. Apply, Box 2001, Utopia.

Such an ad doesn't appear very often, so Graeme and Gabriela Clarke decided they had to make the life they wanted happen for themselves. They had met in 1980 on a 23-day safari to the interior of Australia, and after German-born Gabriela returned home, the romance blossomed during Graeme's travels in Europe. In 1984, they settled in Victoria, where Graeme had grown up on a dairy farm.

The idea of organising small-group walking tours hit them while on holiday in Germany. "Our slides of Wilson's Promontory had everyone gasping," said Graeme, "but at that time, access was difficult without private transport, so few of our interstate or overseas visitors got to see the area, one of the most beautiful in the country." Graeme was then working as an accountant with a travel agent, so the idea soon germinated and developed.

They took the first group away in September 1986, calling themselves Walkabout Adventure Tours. "Although the food was always of great concern to us, we didn't emphasise it in our brochures," said Gabriela. "But people were so surprised and delighted by it that we soon realised its importance, and changed the name to Walkabout Gourmet Adventures."

It's easy to understand both the surprise and delight after you sample some of Gabriela's cooking. Our first opportunity to do so came when we stopped for elevenses in Colac Botanic Gardens on our way from Melbourne to do the Great Ocean Road walk. From the back of the Mazda minibus appeared a luscious blackberry and custard flan made with fruit picked the previous day on Graeme's parents' farm, and a chocolate-nut loaf called convent

cake – nobody knew why, but it was heavenly. Thermoses of boiling water were quickly transmuted into tea and freshly dripped coffee.

They're setting a high standard, I thought, wondering how it could be maintained far from their home base. But it was. Every meal for the next three days was a triumph of presentation, imagination and, not least, nutrition. Although she's had no professional training as a chef, Gabriela had a grandmother who was a fantastic cook, and the family always had fresh herbs and vegetables from the garden. Both Gabriela and Graeme believe in the importance of healthy eating, and what they don't grow themselves, they get from Greens & Grains in Prahran, where all the produce is biodynamic or organically grown.

We stopped for lunch at a pretty picnic area on the beach at Port Campbell. While we browsed through the small but very interesting museum, our hosts set out an array of salads, quiches, cold meats, wonderful bread, cheese and fruit. (They cook all the previous day before a tour, with the help of a third person. Our group was smaller than the maximum of 10 guests, but there would have been a lot of preparation.)

Port Campbell National Park runs in a strip of varying width along a coastline of spectacular limestone formations. "London Bridge" (which has fallen down since my visit), and the Twelve Apostles, which stand like sentinels on guard against the relentless attack of the ocean, are well known. The coast is in constant retreat but in the end, the sea is bound to win. On a pleasant sunny day, such



as we enjoyed, it's not easy to imagine the wilder moods of the area, but tales of shipwrecks from last century make a fascinating counterpoint to enjoyment of the scenery. Graeme has a good background knowledge of the areas they walk in and was able to field most of our questions.

After we had explored the coast a little, Gabriela took the minibus and drove to the farmhouse at Johanna, where we were to sleep for the next two nights. The rest of us made our way there on foot, tramping the wind-swept shore. The beaches along this stretch of coast are pristine and beautiful, many quite deserted because they're either dangerous or inaccessible. Bell's Beach has become a mecca for surfies from all around the world.





From left, Gabriela and Graeme Clarke; the ideal spot for a picnic, overlooking Melanesian Beach; a pocket of rainforest in Melba Gully; and above, "London Bridge", which recently fell down

By the time we reached the farmhouse, Gabriela had dinner well underway – just time for a quick dip in the heated indoor pool, a shower, and a drink. From the "bar", a large crate they brought with them, Graeme produced a very presentable choice of aperitifs. "Obviously, we can't carry everything, but we can satisfy most requests. I like to feature good Victorian wines, and there's always beer. If anyone has a special preference, they've only to let us know, and we'll include it." Packing for each trip is different, and checklists ensure that nothing is overlooked – right down to taped music to suit every occasion.

Meanwhile, wonderful aromas of roasting pork were wafting from the oven, and Gabriela was constructing salads that were almost too pretty to eat. She uses platters rather than bowls for these works of art. She plans the menus carefully and keeps records so that

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when people go on their next walk, the dishes are always different. Diabetics or anyone on a special regimen such as Pritikin need only to say so. Gabriela simply adjusts the menus.

Sharing both the chores and cooking, she and Graeme are a very well-organised duo. In fact, the running of the whole venture is impressive. When no one else is around they chatter away in German so that Graeme keeps in practice. During the winter here, they transfer their operation to Europe, conducting

walking trips for small groups in France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Germany, and taking charge of meals and accommodation. "It's a little different from what we do in Australia," says Gabriela. "We don't cook, but we order the meals in advance, because many people find foreign menus intimidating and stick to things they recognise. This way, they get to try the regional specialties that tourists don't always know about."

Travel is in a hired minibus – Gabriela leads the walks while Graeme transports the luggage so that, when the group arrives, the bags are in the rooms and everyone can relax before the evening meal. "The walking there is different, too," Gabriela continues, "and although there are a few mountains, it's not really strenuous."

"The tracks are so good that you don't have to concentrate on your feet," explains Graeme. "We actually walk farther, but you don't notice. We've taken people who weren't particularly fit, and never had any problems. It's amazing how quickly their level of fitness improves." Guests include people from all

around the world, some who have done walks with them in Australia, or heard about the tours from friends. "This year, we've had to increase the number, and we're already taking bookings for 1991. We're now including trips to Munich and Venice, which we know will continue to be popular."

**N**ext morning, after a splendid breakfast that began with homemade muesli, we drove to Melba Gully State Park to walk Madsens Track, an hour's easy ramble that loops through cool forest glades. The 48ha park is a tiny pocket of rainforest with totally different plantlife from the coast only a short distance away. Glow worms live in the damp mossy banks along parts of the track, Graeme informed us. Our itinerary promised a look at them that night – they're only visible in velvety darkness. No one in our party had ever seen a glow worm, and we began eagerly to question our host, who sheepishly admitted that he hadn't either. So far, he admitted, no group had been able to rise to the occasion after the evening meal. On the spot, we vowed to be the first.

A short drive took us toward the coast, and then on foot again for an hour or so to a picnic spot high on a headland overlooking Melanesian Beach. For walking, we were each issued with a small backpack containing a refreshing lemony drink, an emergency muesli bar, and light rain gear, just in case. Graeme carried the lunch, which centred on a simple chicken curry dish that drew raves all round. Gabriela served it with a saffron-flavoured rice pilau, salads, fruit, and more of the wonderful bread that she gets from Natural Tucker Bakery in Ripponlea. Both the setting and the meal were perfection.

Dinner on Sunday evening is always the gala affair of the weekend, and guests are asked to dress for it. Not everyone takes this too seriously – one group who have been away with the Clarkes seven times, once dressed impeccably from the waist up, but kept on their shorts and walking shoes. Graeme took photos above and below the table for the record. For our party, this meal turned out to



**Morning light. A dairy farm only about 300m from the shore was home base for three days of walking on the spectacular Victorian coast. Facing page, as we walked along the top of a ridge, vistas of green valleys stretched away far below**



be the hit of the trip. Three small raclette ovens were placed strategically along the long table with plates of cheeses, including the correct raclette for this operation, chopped ham, and waxy yellow-fleshed steamed potatoes. Gorgeous-looking salads completed the spread, and we were invited to toast our own little treats topped with melting cheese in the glowing ovens, which were about the size of a cake tin. They have tiny pans that slide in under the heating element. As if this were not enough, dessert soon followed – profiteroles with chocolate and cream.

It took all our resolve to change clothes and set off to see the glow worms. It was quite different walking the track at night, with even the moon's beams excluded by the dense canopy. With the aid of torchlight, we reached a likely spot near Anne's Cascade, and switched off. Gradually, as our eyes became accustomed to the inky blackness, pinpoints of light began to appear in clusters along the banks. Glow worms are the larvae of a species of small fly – their light attracts minute insects to a sticky trap where they meet their doom. The longer we gazed, the more we could see of the shadowy world of these fascinating little beasts.

On Monday morning, I woke to a view like a Hans Heysen painting through my window. The valley was shrouded in silvery mist, pierced by shafts of pink from the rising sun. Cows were strung out along the crest of a slight rise. Quickly, I flung on some jeans, grabbed my camera, and rushed outside, but already the scene had lost some of its magic in the fast-changing light. After another astonishing breakfast, millet porridge with plum compote, platters of prosciutto, ham, hot rolls, fruit, and more, we filled our water bottles and set off to walk through Otway National Park toward Dinosaur Cove, now attracting the attention of fossil-hunters from all around the world.

We returned in time for a barbecue lunch, and then, with planes to catch, it wasn't possible to linger any longer. The drive back to Melbourne took us along the spectacular Great Coast Road, which swoops and climbs, mostly within sight of the sea, through Lorne, with its faint air of remembering its more genteel past, to Anglesea, Geelong, and eventu-

ally, the city for the flight home.

This is a class act – nobody does it better. The walks are all to beautiful areas, and vary in length from one to 14 days. This year, they will also include some cross-country skiing. One itinerary takes the Clarkes to Dinner Plain, a burgeoning storybook village that has so captivated them they've bought land there and plan to build. "It will be wonderful to have our own lodge," says Gabriela, "and not have to compromise on the little extra touches, such as having the right glasses."

Four years down the track, they both agree that the best thing has been the wonderful people they've met from all walks of life. "Some have become almost like family," adds Gabriela. "It's been hard work . . . there's always a lot of preparation, but we have a lifestyle we both really love."

For my fellow guests, what most amazed them, apart from the glow worms, was the standard of the meals. One summed it up, "I never realised that healthy food could look and taste so wonderful."

#### GABRIELA'S MUESLI

- 100g almonds
- 100g pecans
- 100g hazelnuts
- 200g green pumpkin seeds (pepitas)
- 5 tablespoons pinenuts
- 500g biodynamic rolled oats
- 250g barley flakes
- 250g bran
- 200g oat bran
- 200g raw wheatgerm
- 300g sultanas
- 5 tablespoons sesame seeds
- 5 tablespoons linseeds

Chop nuts and pumpkin seeds coarsely in a food processor, and mix thoroughly with the remaining ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Store in large screw-top jars for use as required.

Makes about 2.5kg.



**Note:** To serve, soak enough muesli for the number of servings for 6-8 hours, or overnight, in water, milk or apple juice. Serve with chopped seasonal fruit or berries, milk or yoghurt, and honey, if desired.

#### CONVENT CAKE

- 100g unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 200g sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla sugar
- 4 eggs, separated
- 1/2 cup cream
- 100g hazelnuts, coarsely ground
- 100g almonds, coarsely ground
- 150g cooking chocolate, coarsely grated
- 200g flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder

Grease a 24 x 12 x 6cm loaf pan and line base with greased baking paper. Cream butter and sugars, and beat in egg yolks, one at a time. Stir in cream, nuts and chocolate. Sift flour with baking powder. Whisk egg whites until stiff,





but not dry. Fold flour and egg whites gently into butter mixture, pour into prepared pan, and bake at 175C for about 50 minutes, or when a skewer, inserted in the centre of the cake, comes out clean.

Serves 10-12.

#### MILLET PORRIDGE WITH PLUM COMPOTE

- 125g millet
- 3 cups milk
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 3 pieces star anise
- 5 cloves
- 1kg plums, stoned
- Honey or sugar (optional)

Combine millet with milk and 1 cup of water, and bring to the boil, stirring occasionally. Simmer for 40-50 minutes, stirring from time to time to prevent sticking.

Meanwhile, tie spices securely in a double-thickness square of muslin. Simmer the plums with spices and enough water to cover the bottom of the saucepan until tender. (Sweeten to taste with honey or sugar, if desired.) Discard spice bag, and serve millet porridge with the plums and juice.

Serves 6.

#### PUMPKIN SOUP

- 1kg pumpkin, peeled and chopped into chunks
- Vegetable salt
- 3 cups milk
- 1 tablespoon butter
- Pinch of sugar (optional)
- Freshly ground pepper and nutmeg
- Green pumpkin seeds or pistachios, coarsely ground

Cook pumpkin with about 1 cup of water and vegetable salt to taste in a cast-iron or other heavy-based saucepan, covered, on low heat for about 1 hour. Drain and purée. Heat milk to boiling point, add pumpkin purée, butter, (sugar), and pepper and nutmeg to taste, and simmer for 10 minutes. Serve immediately, sprinkled with pumpkin seeds or pistachios.

Serves 4-6.

#### VENISON WITH A CORN CRUST

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 800g venison, trimmed of all fat and tendons, and cut into 2cm cubes
- 1 medium carrot, peeled, and finely diced
- 1 stalk of celery, cut in small strips
- 125ml light red wine, Beaujolais or similar
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon vegetable salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste

#### Corn crust

- 30g butter
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 4 slices bread, toasted and cut into cubes
- 2 small eggs
- 1 cup cream
- 1/2 teaspoon vegetable salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 2 cans corn kernels (440g), drained

Heat oil in a heavy-based frying pan, and fry onion and garlic until golden. Remove with a slotted spoon. Brown meat all over on high heat. Return onion mixture to pan with carrot and celery. Add wine, herbs, seasonings and tomato paste, and cook for about 10 minutes.

For crust, melt butter in a frying pan and fry onion until golden brown. Toss toast cubes in a dry pan over moderate heat for a few minutes, and turn into a bowl with onion. Whisk eggs with cream, salt and pepper, pour over toast mixture, and leave to soak for a few minutes. Add corn kernels and mix well.

Transfer meat to a cast-iron casserole or large ovenproof dish, and top with corn crust mixture. Bake at 240C for 45-50 minutes.

Serves 4-6.

#### TRAVEL DETAILS

Lynn Cole flew to Melbourne by courtesy of Ansett



**Walkabout Gourmet Adventures** offers walking, cycling, canoeing, horse-riding, and cross-country skiing tours of differing lengths, from 1 day to 14 days, and in a variety of locations, both in Australia and in Europe. Meals and accommodation are included.

For further information, write to PO Box 2179, North Brighton, Vic 3168, phone (03) 598 4904, fax (03) 670 0985.



Bookings and inquiries can also be made at **The Travel Professionals Pty Ltd**, 209 Toorak Rd, South Yarra, Vic 3141, phone (03) 240 8188, fax (03) 240 9976; **Ausventure**, Suite 1, Strand Passage, 870 Military Rd, Mosman, NSW 2088, phone (02) 960 1188; **Peregrine Travel (SA) Pty Ltd**, 192 Rundle St, Adelaide 5000, phone (08) 223 5905; and at **Victour** offices in all states.



**Greens & Grains**, Natural Health Food Store, 123 Greville St, Prahran 3181, phone 51 4256.



**Natural Tucker Bakery**, 69 Glen Eira Rd, Ripponlea, phone 523 0061.

#### CHICKEN CURRY LUNCHEON DISH

- 2 cold barbecued chickens
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 2 tablespoons mango chutney
- 2 tablespoons apricot jam
- 2 tablespoons good natural mayonnaise
- Cream (optional)

Remove and discard chicken skin and cut the flesh into small pieces. Heat oil in a heavy-based frying pan, and fry onion with garlic and curry powder until onion is softened. Add contents of pan to chicken with chutney, jam, and mayonnaise. Mix well and refrigerate, covered, for at least 12 hours. If desired, a few tablespoons of cream can be stirred through just before serving.

Serves 8.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LYNN COLE  
AND GRAEME CLARKE