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# NARRATIVE STREAMS

## Day 1: October morning, Corinna

We board the Fatman Ferry on the southern side of the Pieman River, pay the ferryman, then we're on our way into the Arthur-Pieman National Park via Corinna. Robert Hutton is on weekend duty shuttling cars and hikers across the river on a two-car pontoon. Hutton, lean, fortyish, is one of the last bullock drivers in Tasmania. He and his team of six selectively log the forest for hydro-poles. And there's work enough for his slow and methodical trade: the log-grab on dozers damages tree veins, making the logs untreatable for poles. The forest industry flows through Hutton's own veins: his father drove a logging truck; his grandfather drove a bullock team.

His story is one of slow time and fast time. Time's metronymic quality resonates on the Parks and Wildlife sign near the Information booth: '15 minutes (return) to the Slender Tree Fern' (*Cyathea cunninghamii*). On the track I pass an unremarkable tree, perhaps eight inches in diameter, about the height of a tall shrub. What is remarkable is that this scrawny celery-top pine (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*), is two hundred years old, only a quarter of the way through its eight hundred year life span. Slow time and fast time.

Corinna (Korerrennaa) was settled by whites in 1881. According to Parks and Wildlife, the Pieman River is named for Thomas Kent, a baker, transported to Macquarie Harbour. Other accounts list Alexander Pearce, the infamous cannibal, as the pieman. In the matter of slow time, the Petaanidik lived on the river previous to this concern for nomenclature.

I can't find an area designated as the Tarkine on the 1:100,000 map, which shows instead segmented terrain demonstrating human use. I discover that 'The Tarkine' is conceptual, a term used to describe the area previously occupied by the Tarkineer people in northwest Tasmania.

But, as is pointed out to me by Diane Polson (she and Phillip Polson manage the Park), ‘We don’t call it the Tarkine. It’s the Arthur-Pieman National Park.’ From within the myrtle forest above Corinna, pacific gulls (*Larus pacificus*) play contextual confusion, their call mimicking the gravel-bleating sound of sheep and rural domesticity. This is where I’m to join a dozen people, mostly photographers, and spend a week in the Tarkine, an area including temperate rainforest, button-grass plains, and coast.

#### Night: Savage River

It’s after 8pm and we’re camped in rainforest country by the Savage River. The walk in was strenuous. We’d begun light-footed enough, chatting away five kilometres of white stone track. Dave Warth, ABC cameraman, carted packs for the first five kilometres in his 1992 Toyoto Troop Carrier, stopping two kilometres short of the base camp because of unsurpassable track. We’d donned packs, divvied out foodstuff and set off, ingenuous to what these particular two kilometres implied. Another two clicks, no worries. It was two clicks and two hours of muscle burning, maximum impact bush walking, alternately sweating and rain-soaked, hauling packs which, for a dozen of the walkers, were filled with camera equipment. Heads down, many of us unwittingly grasped the cutty grass (*Gahnia grandis*), which grows face-high, avenue thick, and slices fingers deep. It’s dusk, but we’re too noisy to spot emerging animals. A possum has preceded us, its tear-shaped scat arranged in a glossy display on the earth. The smell of wet clay and compost is fundamental. It is both faecal and fecund. I wear it on my boots, on my trousers, on my jacket, and in my fingernails. I am not yet ready to be ‘of the earth’ and entertain instead the aesthetic notion of ‘fundamental’, which in music, refers to the note in a chord that gives it harmony.

I walk with Troy Melville, a sixth generation Tasmanian, carrying a pack and a Sony PD150. We lose the track, then sight a purple mug hooked on a branch—a fortuitous if unwitting track marker. It’s 7:15 pm by the time we get into camp. Now we are set to play omnivores. And here is dinner, hot and smelling up the night when the pan slips off the burner. Rob Gray, a fuzzy logic expert, comments on ‘unbalanced meals,’ but we eat well, though Darvis plucks carrots and zucchinis out of the dirt claiming it’s all biotic. Glen Turvey holds a purple mug, hunting milk for his coffee.

Unless you are luckless enough to find yourself standing in the Savage River, you can’t see the sky from this point in the rainforest. A

patch of night, bearing a few stars and one that is particularly yellow, is visible through a hole in the forest canopy. I look up and thank God for over-trousers.

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### **Day 2: Savage River Base Camp, Morning**

GPS 41° 33' S; 145° 07' E

No water it seems is quiet on the West Coast. The Savage River tolled throughout the night. Temperatures were down to three degrees says Geoff Murray, a gadget man with a weather-beaten hat and a state-of-the-art Global Positioning System. It's 7:40am; it's raining, and there's public excitement about a missing bag of dried milk. The guides discuss individual levels of responsibility concerning the milk and then search the tents to determine which of the punters carried the milk into camp. No one, it seems.

Today's destination is a dolomite arch. Rob Gray, who sports an old-growth beard with two silver stripes down its length, is staying on site with his Canon F1. The rest of us set off across the fast-flowing Savage River, which is partially bridged by a large log. Glen and Geoff discuss SLR 66s, SLR 67s and the angle of tilt while they log-balance.

We're soon on a steep contour, back in thamnic rainforest with its overstorey of myrtles (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*). Then we're into the horizontal forest (*Anodopetalum biglandulosum*). The second part of horizontal's botanical name, *biglandulosum*, suggests the difficulty of trying to navigate *through* the tree, without getting lost. In this type of forest there's no sun for guidance. And the horizontal confounds notions of spatiality. Forward and backward look the same. Life for the horizontal begins vertically, but weight and gravity conspire; the horizontal bends, sends up more vertical branches, which in turn bend, send up verticals, and so on. It's a Gondwanaland species that's evolved ignorant of human ergonomics: its branches too low for a body to bend under, and too high to step over, especially with packs. We stop to regain breath and balance.

When the body has time to rest, the eye takes time to range. Away from the river we hear the rainforest silence. Red tubular bell flowers, known as climbing heath (*Prionotes cerinthoides*), wave unheard music at the feet of myrtles; a scent-silent female mountain pepper (*Tasmanian lanceolata*) jostles with a native laurel (*Anopterus glandulosus*). Both have elliptical leaves, and both are in flower, but nothing will come of their

embrace. Black Currawongs (*Strepera fuliginosa*) will later feed on the pepper berries which fruit from the female's two-lobed ovary. I bite a pepper leaf, and the pepper slowly returns the bite at the back of my throat.

The farther we walk into the warmer climate of the valley, the more trees there are in bloom. It rains and once more we slide on light coloured clay, the decomposition of felspathic rocks, the biblical material of the human body, a first earth. Dimensions shift, and knee-high celery top pines (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*) tower above the clay columns of the yabby whose burrowings create layers of coiled clay, hand-tall above the creamy slip.

An hour and a half later, we've covered a distance of 870 metres as the currawong flies. Slow time. We drink from the Longback River. No one bothers with Micropur tablets, though animals must die, bacteria must exist, in these waters. The tannin-tinged river plays tricks with light and turns the bedrock to amber. On the muted grey, white, and pink rocks, we lunch on red capsicum, and avocado.

Two Queenslanders discuss the demise of diversity in wilderness equipment. Murray sets up his Japanese Horseman camera, talking enthusiastically about its versatility, and forgetting, temporarily at least, the negative aspect of its weight. He covers his head with a black cloth, draping it over the camera bellows to protect them from wind vibration. Beyond the cloth, above his head, we see him shielded by the over-arching limbs of one of the myrtle types (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*). These are the tallest of the rainforest trees, their small flat leaves crocheting sunlight onto understorey. Male and female flowers coexist on the tree, and are wind pollinated. It seems a workable system. Pollen records date back 85 million years, for this too is a Gondwanaland plant. But at this particular moment in time, we're one month too early to experience the myrtle in flower.

Afternoon

GPS 41°34'S; 145° 07'E

We're at the Natural Arch. The sun is out, the wind is quietening, and the arch, fêted with epiphytic ferns, straddles the Longback River to which it partially owes its form. Seismic action, perhaps a freeze-fracture, has been widened by the force of water; the acid tannin in the water has, in turn, dissolved the limestone, hollowing out caves, and creating stalactites and stalagmites. Simon East, hydro-geologist, places the arch as pre-Cambrian. Simon, in the upper regions of height with a firm grip of the Earth, strides through the scene as he sets up a 1950s German Linhof camera ('Pre-Cambrian' he says). Ralph Ashton, lawyer,

sets up a Nikon digital SLR ('Post-Millennium' he quips). I sit on earth that sprouts moss, liverwort, and lichen. In those few words I've managed to completely eliminate diversity. There are, globally, about ten thousand species of moss, about six thousand species of liverwort, and 'lichen' is actually a fungus and alga engaging in a joint-partnership that can last for hundreds of years. I can't name a single member of this miniature fern 'rain' forest, which returns water to the atmosphere. It spreads up and over a llama-necked manfern (*Dicksonia antarctica*). And now the manfern becomes the dramatic focus, its centre containing a clutch of young fronds, curled around miniature white-knobbed globes, mohawked in brown fur.

Loïc Le Guilly, a fine-boned, intense Frenchman, is setting up his Silvestri for a panoramic shot. Across the stream, young manferns claim the top of a rock, their brown shredded fronds thrown over the side, suggesting a balcony. Behind the terraced ferns lies a log upon which more ferns feed, and a bird, a grey shrike-thrush perhaps, tears into the bark for insects. Loïc's pan continues, and to the right a thin-limbed leatherwood (*Eucryphia lucinda*) leans over the river, its curving branches performing a graceful horizontal gesture in its otherwise skyward-seeking company.

The 'all clear' is sounded in French-fringed English. We crawl from behind rocks and trek back to camp, where later, as stir-fry is being served, Dave James, orange-bellied parrot enthusiast, emerges from out of the night and joins us.

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### **Day 3: morning. Callidendrous rainforest**

**T**he overnight rain settles to drizzle, we're leech-free, and Darvis is leaving to get dried milk and toilet paper. Dave Warth, a quiet, unhurried man, leaves also, to join photographers trekking the Savage River Rainforest Corridor (a slurry Pipeline route) through the Tarkine.

For the rest of us today's destination is Longback Ridge. We cross the Savage. A small upward deviation takes us away from thamnian rainforest. Of the four different types of rainforest, there are thirty-nine plant communities within these types. All I know is that by walking a hundred metres off yesterday's course, we are now in a callidendrous rainforest: more light filters through the canopy; there is no horizontal, and the understorey is clearer.

We stand by a myrtle with epiphytes stair-casing its sides. Large slabs

of green, brown, and black bracket fungi appear to bite into tree-trunks, their rubbery uppers ringed with scales of growth, looking for all the world like misplaced molluscs, riding wet-land barques of myrtle.

The photographers are less willing to speed through the undergrowth today, and Jarrah Keenan must exchange destination-focus for the f-Stop focus of the group. Talk about TIF and pirated software is punctuated by screech as Yellow-Tailed Black Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*) redirect conversation, so copyright law turns to bush lore. Does the sight and sound of black cockatoos forecast rain? We conclude that, in the rainforest at least, this particular bush lore has a high degree of probability. Jarrah, a being impelled by haste, pauses to talk about a flowering Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*). Its smooth, grey and white bark is mottled with leaves in complementary colours: green on top, a creamy-yellow underneath. Early settlers used sassafras to make pegs; being tannin-free they didn't stain clothes. Latecomer Dave James, who's with the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Energy, discusses the sassafras's capacity to amputate its twigs if a twig is respiring and not 'pulling its weight' by producing. It's a model of tough politics, and the issue of capillary action prompts further corporate analogies: Jarrah declares he's heard the heart beat of a tree. The naturalist looks at the photographer, who looks at the academic, who looks elsewhere. Glen takes up the slack and recalls hearing the rapid heart beats of an entire forest when a chain saw was fired up.

In defence of tree-huggers (Wordsworth included) trees do make noises. Or rather it's possible to hear noise beneath tree bark: the sucking and sawing of long-horned beetles, crusader bugs, tree-hoppers, saw flies (Gondwanaland insects), gum moths, scale insects, and borers, all simultaneously fattening themselves for predators, while carving homes for other animals, such as bats who, like we who disturb their diurnal rest, are placental mammals.

We head for camp, straddling low-decibel logs. The action is one of intimacy; a log, chronicle of uncountable species, collapses beneath the touch of a hand, shredding into sheets of a myrtle hardback. Hands — wet, cold, grateful for the smoothness (and lexical humour) of solid dogwood bark (*Pomaderris apetala*). Pause to appreciate the slow time embrace of dogwood and leatherwood (*Eucryphia lucinda*) in sticky bud; touch fronds that spring beneath a finger's touch; sidestep the rubbery lettuce-leaf fungi, fallen from the canopy above, which vibrate

as one boot sinks into ground spongy with compost.

I'm told the word 'callidendrous' means 'Cathedral-like'. It doesn't and I know it, but out here I don't feel the need to check etymology. Perhaps it's the suggestion though, which tempts me to entertain outmoded metaphysical concepts — for the fallen trees, dressed in the living shroud of fernery (gypsy, finger, and filmy), seem testaments to the dignity of death. What was and what is: together, a palpable, unspoken, unwritten, agreement that in their slow dying, in the myrtles' aeon-laboured decay, they daily give life, and daily moss is celebrated upon the body of the crumbling grande dame, where young staghorn rise up from where the sap once ran.

We are slightly north east of the track when, suddenly, we slide, any which way, into a bowl-shaped pit, where a cave entrance is so heavily fringed with kangaroo fern (*Microsorium diversifolium*) that it's barely visible. Opinions fly as to whether it is a cave or an abandoned mine. The entrance is human-high, wide enough for two, and ankle deep in water and pebbles. Torch lights catch on weblike filaments hanging from a roof embedded with sparkling dipterous glow-worms. We spot one spindly black spider, and then another. Their habitat and glistening silken threads suggests that they might be *Ectatosticata troglodytes*, like the cave-dwellers in Mole Creek's limestone caves. We're exuberant, as though we've discovered something mythical, although in reality we know that it's just a damp clay-hole in the ground.

At camp, I fetch water, Dave chops onions, Ralph makes guacamole. We eat heartily. We're shifting camp tomorrow and don't want to carry food out. It's 8:20pm and black currawongs are 'key-lock, key-lock-ing' nearby. Rob Gray, wearing a purple-flapped cap, sits cross-legged in purple-thermal tights. On his forehead the down-turned headlamp floods his face and pours into his Mexican stir-fry. The light accentuates the movement of his silver-streaked beard as he eats. And he looks like a gnome, released from the mine with its glow-worms and troglodytes, across the river.

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#### Day 4: Morning.

I thought I heard an animal last night. I expected devils (*Sarcophilus harrisi*) to sniff us out, but this hasn't happened. Unlike nights on travelled tracks where animals have learned that humans mean easy pickings, the nights here have been animal-still to untrained ears. We're camped in the habitat of tiger cats (spotted-tailed quoll, *Dasyurus*

*maculatus*) along with the cousin it's often confused with, the native cat (eastern quoll, *Dasyurus viverrinus*). As you'd expect with an ecology that contains cats (*ecology*: 'household'), there are marsupial mice engaged in dramas of life, death, and sole parenting. The dusky mouse (dusky antechinus, *Antechinus swainsonii*) builds her single-parent nest close to river banks — her mate dying within three weeks of mating.

We break camp and head for button-grass plains (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*). The valley is steep; it's pouring rain, the ground is slick, and with every step we slide from toe to knee. When we hit the straight, we drink copiously, chomp scroggin, and adjust to the change in space. It's possible to see the sky now, and that possibility brings about the realisation that for the last few days our eyes have been focused at close and middle distance only. I have a peculiar sensation that the short field of vision has changed the shape of my face, which feels like my eyes—hollow and round. The exposed open spaces and increasingly regressive atmospheric shapes seem now to stretch the eyes, which in turn seem to flatten the face as if to accommodate landscape framing.

Dave proves to be the embodiment of etymology. 'The Beloved Friend' fetches his Subaru, and transports packs for the last five kilometres. Back at the van it's sunny, it rains, it hails. We eat lunch, another repast in the present, and at 2:50 we're on the old Road to Nowhere, Hunting That Shot. The road (now the Western Explorer), bisects the forests in the Donaldson Valley and was a contentious site for Tarkine conservationists back in 1995-1996. We drive through a land of sky and buttongrass plains. The Meredith Range, to the right, is pitted with white quartz and contouring shadows. Loïc is suddenly alert. He calls for the van to halt; seizes his camera, his tripod, and the moment, and jogs down the road towards Longback Hill. This is a man with purpose — a Crusoe and his Manfrotto.

The panorama is impressive, but it is still too much to take in after the enclosure of the rainforest. From the greens and greys of the rainforest, the eye must adapt to colour. Banksia (*marginata*), and yellow-pupiled eyebright (*Euphrasia collina*), wave blooming-promises, for the soil is warmer here than inland. Sedgeland water slicks white pre-Cambrian quartz that is sliced and squared and forms the banks of the Road to Nowhere. Miniature streams feed algae and moss, and buttongrass 'babies' colonise the open cut of the white road. Black ants build high-rise homes out of leaf material, above the wet. Yabbies build mud cities; and more 'petit mort' mice nest here: the male swamp antechinus

(*Antechinus minimus*) also dies soon after mating.

It's 6:40pm. There's tension in the air. Conversation turns to the best time to shoot. Language such as 'light waves', 'light as a stream of particles' reveals the infusive qualities of light and water, and of organic and technological dependency on qualities of light. The photographers play verbal football and shoot concepts to ludic heights. They burn with the promise of the hour when the light from the setting sun glides in sideways. They feast on light denied them in the rainforest where sunset and sunrise is closed off by the canopy. Here, the sky takes up half the scene.

Everyone disappears.

I sit on grey schist on the side of a road whose white cut is visible across the grey-green distances. A metre high Smithton pepper (*E. ovata*) claims territory on the roadside. Small red eruptions, lerps, cling to its olive-green leaves. Lerps are a kind of tent for insects, providing protective covering for the sap-sucking psyllids, which in turn produce honeydew — a sort of psyllid scat. I can see for miles, and wonder if poetry will ever accommodate 'kilometres' in a metrical pattern. The sun settles on my back; small birds chirrup; a fly investigates. Bird language is beyond my ken. I need books to teach me and can only guess from the biogeography that one of the sounds I hear belongs to the scrubtit (*Acanthornis magnus*), but such knowledge has no impact on the singer, nor on its uninvited audience.

I try to see the *landuage*, but cannot escape the language. I'm bound to a symbolic world of phonemes which is currently serving up clichés. The context is huge. I yearn for lerp structures and watch the shadows sift through landscape without the strain of human hill-grunting that this morning's effort took. The sky is seldom still. Shadows mobilise the scenery, creating a dark row of trees, and eclipsing two gums. But no sooner do I look up from a line written than a new chapter appears: the dark row of trees has disappeared, and what minutes ago bore the solidity of mountains, is now silhouette. Five black cockatoos precision-glide, flapping chevrons, till their black melds with the valley and disappears into shadow.

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### Day 5: 7:45am

We've overnighted at Bark Hut Camp the base camp for the 1995-1996 Campaign. The sounds of the Savage River echo at a gentler pace in the tree tops of a mixed forest. The 'timbre' is muted: movement, sound, and light, are above us, and clumps of spiny moss,

like vegetative echidnas, hug the forest floor. It was late when we pitched tents last night, so I woke to a neighbourhood of eucalypts, leatherwoods (the bee-keepers' favourite), sassafras, wattle, white-flowered stinkwood (*Zieria arborescens*), and not a trunk without a sheath of green. It rained heavily while we slept, and as we breakfast in a walled garden, glossy drops shaped by weight fall from the tree canopy onto hat brims and into bowls, breaking the meniscus of tea-water.

We drive back to Corrina (Palawa for Thylacine cub) *en route* to Pieman Heads. Craig Garland, as idiosyncratic as the driftwood he resembles, has driven from Rocky Cape to boat us up the Pieman River. By 6:40pm he's made two trips with one more to go. He looks cold. The sun is sinking, the wind is rising, and it's pelting rain.

10:20pm Pieman Heads

I'm in my tent. Camped on the northern side of Hardwicke Bay where the waters of the Pieman meet the Southern Ocean. The sea sounds like a plane readying for take off, but forever grounded. Wind ricochets through the scrub, and the tent frame is mobile. A brown bug the size of a fingernail head butts my headlamp.

My hands smell of petrol as I write — petrol siphoned from the van, to make the last trip. We set off at 8:00pm, the four-stroke churning the dark waters into a ribbon of white backwash, a liquid carving of its own Road to Nowhere. The Pieman is sink calm, dark as night, sweet as treacle. At each bend in the river the trees and banks close in behind us, creating the illusion that there is no way but forward. Another bend, and the treed mountains on both sides dip and curve and meet in the middle of the river, resembling a broad-lipped vase that holds the bouquet of a greying sky. Then the Pieman becomes washboard rough and we bounce (PFD-free) off benches. The wind slices through rounded shoulders, while Craig, stoic and gloveless, his grey, dreadlock hair indistinguishable from the wool of his beanie, clasps the tiller and stares into the dark as though he could keep going all the way to Tierra del Fuego.

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### Day 6: Morning

**T**he trekking experience has shifted. From enclosure to exposure. Three metres from the river's edge there's a green clapboard shack with a brick chimney and three water tanks. This is still part of the Tarkine, an area bound by the Arthur River to the north, and the Pieman River to the south, but containing different land-use areas. The

sound of the sea and the sight of the dark river are the anodynes to the shock of relocating from the rainforest. Our current spatial dynamics — horizontality, expanses of sky — are underscored by the multiple ways humans construct lines of ownership. The shack owner has brought Windermere to the Pieman, planting daffodils in tight clumps set amongst the scrub. The owner has also brought Bathurst to the Pieman: abandoned vehicles edge the path to the long drop.

11:10 am Rupert Point

This is a place of leaning. Up the grey sand beach, the olive heads of wind-bonsied tea-trees tilt and touch the earth. Rock columns lean landward, mimicking latitude, at approximately 40°. Colours are muted but sound is not; the sea, ice grey, shatters on sharp brown rocks. At the mouth of this small inlet, green folds of surf dump white foam on a disgorged kelp forest. Kelp bobs and sinks on submerged rocks that step up to the littoral zone and ribbon the reef line. The rubbery kelp resembles flensed whale skin, and the texture is disconcerting: their dislocated roots, the shape and colour of human thigh bones, bespeak the unfathomable.

On an outcrop a hundred metres out to sea a line of upright black-faced cormorants (*Phalacrocorax fuscescens*) face into the wind, hanging iridescent wings out to dry.

1: 20 pm Coordinates 41° 38' 01S 144° 54' 05E 9 metres elevation.

*Carpobrotus rossii* (native pig face) hogs the beach. We lunch in the warmth of a sheltered bowl, beside a midden, one-time gathering place of the Tarkineers. The rubbish here, some almost two hundred years old, some older, consists mainly of *Notohalotis rubber*, mother of pearl shells, the shape of human ears with multiple piercings. Amidst the litter the ground is pitted with the dark grey circular homes of tiny black ants agitated by our invasion.

On the way back we bypass several White Man's Middens: nests of white plastic and brown glass bottles secreted in tea-tree corridors. Nearby, the skeletal remains of a modified late '60s Holden lies rusting into the ground, its gear box as white as beach quartz. This is 'Stone Age' modernity: Stone's Green Ginger wine bottles, and Bridgestone tyres which bear good rubber yet.

4:55 pm Foam Creek.

The name defines  
you. Glistening salt  
crystals the wind

and white foam  
shudders landward into a brown study.  
A blue thronged foam  
sandal to sandfros  
the Dis solution.

The track has changed its nature. And sun sets the bush to blazing. The bright heads of the yellow pimelia (*Pimelia flava*) cap the ends of Jack-in-the-Box necks; the white, pink, and yellow centre of the Bauer (*Bauera rubioides*) bridals the rutted track.

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### Day 7

It's morning; we're gliding upriver. Narratives stream in still water scenery at play with duplicate images. Nineteen swans Rorschach near the bank. As we motor past, they lift, flying low to the water, belly to belly with their reflections. Each is a study in restrained elegance: red beak foremost, necks stretched into bodies tuxed in black, wings gloved white to the elbows; maître d'hôtel, servants to none.

The water is so silent that it's possible to look down on the sky gazing on itself. Reeds and trees split into solids and solution whereas river grass creates a longitudinal buffer in which algae mutes the sky, pierced by bunched reeds. We drift past a white-bellied sea-eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*). Despite its name the whole bird is white except for the soft grey cloak of its back. It sits, huge, confident, and camouflaged on a dead, upright tree at the river's bend. Behind it the skyline evaporates as sunrays burn mist, which rises in patches through the trees.

We turn into the Donaldson River. It is narrower than the Pieman, perhaps fifty feet across. 'Feet; and 'metres' are used concurrently in poetry, and Craig informs me that fishermen also use feet (and pounds) as measurement. Metres and kilograms are used only when the fish are sold, making it the language of commerce. Back on the Pieman, Loïc is mast-heading a boat that is filling up with water. Craig pulls the bung while he fills up with talk about perch, trout, and salmon. One of the denotations of his surname, Garland, is a 'collection of short pieces of literature'. The fisherman's stories include the Tarkine giant crayfish (*Astacopsis gouldi*), also known as tayatea (Palawa), the world's largest freshwater crustacean — growing up to 120mm on a diet mainly of decaying wood, and ranging in earth to sky colours. Garland, from a long line of poachers, talks about lampreys, and of eels that swim up the

Pieman from the Sargasso Sea, an heroic feat that assures them sanctuary at this fisherman's hand.

Afternoon

We return to camp, eat scallops coated with milk-powder, and head for Conical Rocks Point on the opposite side of the river. Alongside us, two groups of swans ride the estuary which is now choppy, its fractal stillness a thing of memory and image, its mirror now surf shards and black ice.

On the southern bank we pass a tree wearing gum boots, and to supplement the visual pun, it bears the legend 'Gum Tree'. The track is flooded and we bushwhack the perimeters as we head for the Coast.

On the beach, the scene is one of detritus *in situ*. Loïc photographs a disembowelled grey bird, and makes the touching comment that 'It's lovely shooting with 100. I've got it up to 250 ASA'. The beach is awash with salt-saturated logs and incidental kelp strips for at least a hundred metres. I stand behind Loïc and watch as he sees, what? Death intersecting the solid line of the middle-distant hill, greys chroma-keying into the grey sky, twigs of a tea-tree, too tall for the heath, bone-stripped.

The sea flows into an inlet, splushing its way up bankside rocks. One batch of smooth-topped rocks resembles the brown spice buns that a pieman might bake. Despite an aversion to domestic metaphors I can't help but notice that beside it stand seven slabs of brown rye, and elsewhere, dough crumbs. And farther along, where the rocks get darker — are the burned crumbs from an inattentive baking. I'm doubting the nomenclature of the Pieman, which is already divided between Kent (notably, a baker) and Pearce. Two centuries ago coming in from the sea, isn't it possible that the 'pieman' area is named for *these* rocks, for their culinary not convict nor cannibal origins? But it's not my place to conjecture.

Further up is Conical Rocks Point. The sides of these colossal structures wear different colours: those with backs to the sea are orange red, and sea grass grows in tufted clumps around the scattered rocks. On the ground, narrow gauged deep groves are etched into the rocks like a train of thought across time. Loïc shares a view: rocks in a group of four, with ponds between them. Stillness and silence, separated only by an idea.

It's dusk and we're nearing the shack settlement. Loïc (who has a MA in Chemistry) seems to have dissolved into thin air. We find him shooting a bennett's wallaby (*Macropus rufogrisus*) which also bears the unfortunate name of red-necked wallaby. It stands patiently, black nose facing the camera, black arms folded across its fawn belly as though it's holding up

its trousers.

We return to find our activities on both sides of the river have been keenly regarded, and that we've been evicted from this morning's site. We relocate to a designated Parks site on the South side of the Pieman. There's very little shelter here from the Roaring Forties, but the site does have a long drop a short walk away, and tank water which squirts out horizontally. At supper, we stand — many of us with damp patches on our midrifts — under a tarp, out of the rain, mugs in hands, and chat about geo-diversity, georegions, and geocentrism.

And here is food, hot and smelling up the night, when the pan slips off the burner, again. But this being leech country (nine tiger-stripes join us within an hour) Darvis does not pluck carrots and out of the dirt and claim it to be biotic.

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### Day 8: 8:30am

**I**t was windy and wet last night, but although the tent shook I slept, cosy in the earth's depression. Breakfast is a muesli bar, along with water in which a leech has boiled to death. We're down to a handful of stalwarts who head off tomorrow for the Pandani camp at Mount Ramsay. I pack the tent, brush off a green-striped leech that stretches indolently across the damp pack, and trek down to the river.

It is Saturday; three boats pass by. Time to play. I study Craig's much photographed face, and decide I am happy to think of him as being driftwood, though he might tap me for it. An itch, and I unzip my leggings to find the indolent green-striped leech flattened out along the sock line. Despite this being a protected area I pull it off and drop it in the river. Aquatic leeches were once used to forecast weather: if they rose, the weather would be bad. My land-leech disappears. We approach the bend in the river where yesterday we saw the white-bellied sea-eagle, and there it is, perched on the tree at the water's edge. Craig turns the boat, but the bird launches itself heavily into the air, its white belly now conspicuous among the green leaves. Instead of photos we're given a piece of the bird: a feather, slowly drifting earthward. •

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