15 – Around Hobart

This is a disparate Hobart itinerary including sites away from Macquarie Street near where it starts, but excluding New Town. You would probably not want to visit them all in one go.

Battery Point

Finding yourself at St David's Park just south of Macquarie Street, skip through it down to Salamanca Place where you will find Astrolabe and the Hobart Bookshop and where you should have a cup of coffee and perhaps read Amanda Lohrey's *The Morality of Gentlemen* (1984), a *roman-à-clef* based on a real-life waterside dispute, and then up the hill, perhaps via Montpelier Retreat, to Battery Point.

Narryna Heritage Museum – 103 Hampden Road (closed Mondays)

Turn left into Hampden Road and soon on your left, unmissable, is a solid Georgian house built in 1834, Narryna. Although I see Sarah Benson Walker (p174) there between 1852 and 1854 most vividly, and, indeed, she seems

25. Anne Coverdale, by Knut Bull, courtesy of the Narryna Heritage Museum

to have been the first to call the house Narryna, it evokes generations of women inhabitants. The little book, available there, *Narryna: The History of a Colonial Gentleman's Residence* (2002, Peter Mercer), sketches their story, ending with its use in the 1950s as an after-care hostel for female tuberculosis patients. The contents of the museum – which include a room devoted to costumes – are not from any one family; many have contributed to it, but somehow they seem right. An example is a portrait of Anne Harbroe Coverdale (p274).

Most credit for its existence as a historic house opened to the public in 1957 goes to **Amy Rowntree** (1885–1962), a teacher appointed the first woman Inspector of Schools in 1919, and her sister, teacher and artist Fearn (**Frances Fearnley Rowntree**, 1892–1966). On retirement, both became historical researchers and, as lifelong inhabitants of Battery Point, Narryna was an obvious focus. Amy is known for several historical publications, in particular *Battery Point: Today and Yesterday* (1951), and Fearn's most relevant is *Battery Point Sketchbook* (1953?). Their sister **Millicent Rowntree** (Milli, b1883), also involved, was Secretary of the Battery Point Progress Association.

Arthur's Circus

Further along Hampden Road, on your left, is the turning into Arthur's Circus. The only connection, very tenuous, I can find with women is that Eliza Arthur's husband, the Governor, bought the plot in 1829 and, in 1837, registered it in the name of Thirza Parramore's husband, his private secretary, for reasons that Amy Rowntree could not fathom. But so obviously feminine is this enchanting circle of cottages, built in 1843 for pensioners and no two alike, and so surprised would you be if you came upon it without a prompt, that it cannot be left out.

Sandy Bay

From Battery Point – a select residential area – we move to another; and Sandy Bay is well worth a drive around for the privileged aura it exudes. When people say that Hobart reminds them of England, this is the only area I have found that qualifies. There are two private houses once inhabited by literary women. The playwright Catherine Shepherd (p237) lived at 109 York Street after 1960, until she moved into a nursing home to die. Isabel Dick (p309) lived, after 1915 when she was widowed, at 9 Red Chapel Road (now Avenue), quite a bit further along past the University. Here she wrote her novels, including *Wild Orchard* (p97). For many literary women (and men) *Tasmanian Literary Landmarks* (1984) by Margaret Giordano and Don Norman is invaluable.

On the corner of Red Chapel Avenue and Sandy Bay Road was the house Derwent Water where Anne Battersby was assigned to work for Agnes Power in 1847 (p161). Sandy Bay has rather changed since then.

Mount Nelson (Trukanini Conservation Area)

Finally, or first, depending on time in Sandy Bay and preference, just before the University, drive up Nelson Road and follow the winding road up and up to the top of Mount Nelson. You get a marvellous view from up there but the signal station and lookout are not the primary destination; follow, instead, a sign that directs you to 'Truganini Conservation Area: dedicated to the Tasmanian Aboriginal People and their Descendants'. Walk along the path until you come to a rocky clearing in the trees with a plaque set into a rock that reads: 'Trucanini died 8 May 1876; Trucanini Park 8 May 1976; dedicated to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and their descendants'.

In May 1976, those descendants may have appreciated the gesture; indeed, Ida West wrote in her reminiscences *Pride Against Prejudice*:

> I like to get up to Truganini Park when the weather is warm. It's nice to go up there and say a prayer and look down the Derwent River. There I feel something on the spiritual side, and I always feel better when I come back home again. Sometimes I wonder why that park is not used more often – it's not far out of Hobart. I went up there one day and met a couple sitting around a seat. I went over and spoke to them. They were from Canada and they reckoned they couldn't understand why it wasn't used more. It's a lovely view when you get on the other side, and look down the Derwent River and remembering the past.

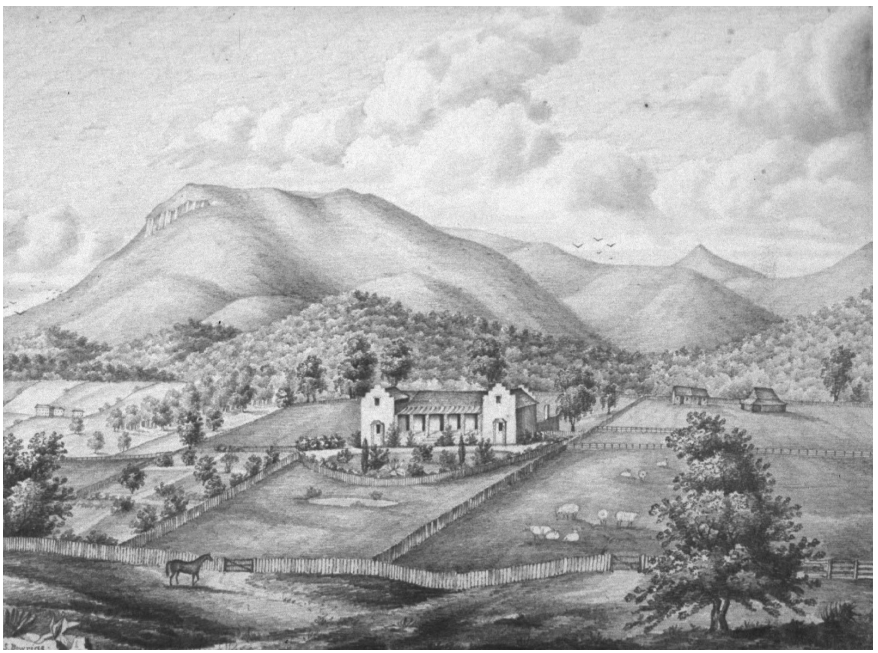
Some of today's Aborigines seem to prefer their own initiatives with regard to their past, rather than those of the state government or, indeed, anyone else. But the visitor without such constraints can appreciate this secluded place as Ida West did. There is another site dedicated to the memory of Trukanini on Bruny Island (p288).

Mount Wellington

The two mountains are rather different. Mount Wellington, named Table Mountain by colonists until 1832, is altogether grander and more dominant of the landscape. From the summit, 1,270 metres above sea level, you feel you can see almost the whole of Tasmania; and you can, at least as far as Ben Lomond. You need to choose your day, though: on a clear day it is a perfect experience, but often the mist comes down low, and in winter it is snow-capped. Even on a good day the air is fresh – a jacket is not a bad idea.

To get to the base of the mountain, drive west along Davey Street, past lovely old houses, and follow the signs. Then up the winding road, built as a relief scheme for the unemployed and opened only in 1937, past, at first, tall thick trees which give way to stunted trees and rocks. As you near the summit, it becomes increasingly bare until, at the top, it is a lunar landscape. The change in vegetation owes something to logging but more to the all consuming fires of 1897, 1914, 1834, 1945 and, the most awful and memorable to today's

Tasmanians, 1967, Black Friday, when 62 people died in the Hobart environs. Emily Bowring's sketch 'Mount Wellington, Tasmania', suggests, however, that, even in 1856, it was not luxuriantly covered.



26. Mount Wellington by Emily Stuart Bowring, 1856, courtesy of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office

Of course, if you are a keen walker, that's how you will want to climb Mount Wellington, just as the artist and traveller **Marianne North** (1830–1890) did in 1881. She wrote in *Recollections of a Happy Life* (1893), when she and the head gardener at Government House, where she was staying, had walked to St Crispin's Well:

> Four miles of walking took us to the lovely spot where the clear water bubbles out amongst the fern-trees and all kinds of greenery. After a rest we plunged right into the thick of it, climbing under and over the stems and trunks of fallen trees, slippery with moss, in search for good specimens of the celery-tipped pine, of which we found some sixty feet high. It was not in the least like a pine, excepting in its drooping lower branches and its straight stem: the leaves were all manner of strange shapes. We also saw fine specimens of sassafras … and the dark myrtle or beech of Tasmania. Quantities of the pretty pandanus-looking plant they call grass-trees or richea, really a sort of heath. The whole bunch looks like a cob of Indian corn, each corn like a grain of white boiled rice, which, again, when shed or pulled off, sets free the real flowers – a bunch of tiny yellow stamens,

> with the outer bracts scarlet. There is also an exquisite laurel, with large waxy white flowers. There were many gum-trees, some of them very big, but mostly peppermint or 'stringy-bark'. The famous blue gum (Eucalyptus globulus) was rare even there …

One of Marianne's paintings that illustrate that word portrait is included, in colour, in *A Vision of Eden: The Life and Work of Marianne North* (1980). Over 800 of her paintings – a record of the tropical and exotic plants from around the world – fill the Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens, London. *Forests and Flowers of Mount Wellington, Tasmania* (nd) by the botanist Winifred Curtis (after whom the Winifred Curtis Scamander Reserve on the east coast is named (p323)), is not readily available.

Some sources suggest that Jane Franklin's Mount Wellington expedition of 1837 (p146) was the first by a white woman, but we know that Salome Pitt had been some way up with her Aboriginal companion in 1810 – the area was well trodden from time immemorial by Miss Story's ancestors, assuming she belonged to the South East nation; and the mountain has several Aboriginal names: Unghanyahletta, Poorantere, and, apparently the most favoured, Kunanyi.

And, two weeks before Jane Franklin's essay, on 8 December, Sarah Poynter (p318), Louisa Anne Meredith's sister-in-law, wrote to her stepmother Mary Meredith at Cambria (p317), how her friend Miss Wandl(e)y had climbed to the top in the hopes of seeing from there where her fiancé, Lieutenant Thomas Burnett, had drowned when his boat capsized during a survey of the River Derwent. A monument to him implying their love was erected in St David's Park (p247).

Jane Franklin's climb or at least the gourmet picnic and the mountain spectacle were described (by her?) in the *Hobart Town Courier* of 22 December 1837:

> As you sat hesitating which first should be attacked, you might observe 5 large ships between the legs of the roast fowl, a cold tongue overlapping the whole of Maria Island, a bottle of claret eclipsing Wyld's Crag, Mount Olympus shut out of sight by a loaf of bread, and the whole of that important, that political, that liberal and sensible city, Hobarton, included within the embrace of the teapot's handle.

In 1843, Jane Franklin commissioned the building of two huts – one at the summit and one at the Springs (half-way up) – to encourage more women to climb the mountain; they were burnt in the fire of 1967 but modern chalets have replaced them. Until the 1890s, ice for refrigeration came from an icehouse built at the Springs.

It is not clear how most women ascended the mountain. Anna Maria Nixon, the Bishop's wife (p148) was lent a pony for a week or two in January 1845 and visited the Springs 'which is', she wrote, 'a terrace walk along the side of the hill.' Along the terrace 'is a watercourse for the Springs which supply the

town with water'. It was the 'fresh sweet woodland smell' which appealed to her most strongly.

Writing of the mountain soon after her arrival in 1840, Louisa Anne Meredith noted in *My Home in Tasmania* that 'Several unfortunate persons who at various times have imprudently attempted the ascent without a guide, have never returned, nor has any vestige of them ever been discovered.' The irony is that in 1924 her husband's niece, **Clara Sabina Meredith** (1857–1924) fell to her death, as the *Mercury* of 2 and 3 September reported, from the area known as the Organ Pipes.

You don't have to climb Mount Wellington to be influenced by it; indeed, Emily Bowring's sketch shows how it dominates the landscape (the Organ Pipes are on the left; Timsbury, the house in the foreground, has been demolished). Tasma, whose house in its lee features later in this itinerary, gives us a very purple, but illuminating, passage in her 1885 autobiographical novel *Not Counting the Cost* concerning the children who lived there:

> They had been born under the shadow of Mount Wellington, and consulted him now more as a kind of huge weather-glass than from any aesthetic appreciation of his venerable beauties. According to the aspect he wore in the morning, they built their hopes upon the day before them. When he appeared arrayed, like a monarch, in royal purple, with his giant crown well out-lined against the shining expanse of blue that canopied him, they felt that the heavens would smile upon them. When, on the other hand, he sulked behind the cloud-wreaths, or showed himself grudgingly under rags and tags of wet mist, they got out their umbrellas and waterproofs. For what other motive should the Tasmanians to-day question him? He has no legends of mediaeval days to recount, though, for all we know to the contrary, he may have a thousand tales as wonderful and dramatic as any of these locked up in his gloomy fastnesses. He has seen a primitive race swept from the face of the earth, goaded convicts hiding like rats in the holes and caves, and runaway prisoners hunted to their doom.

I'm not sure that I think of Mount Wellington as male. Nor does Cassandra Pybus who lived for a while on its slopes, and in her autobiographical essays *Till Apples Grow on an Orange Tree* (1998) wrote:

> Beyond the overgrown European façade of garden was the pipeline, a track which followed the water pipe the whole length of the mountain through the dripping forest of giant manferns, where tendrils of water seeped from every crevice in the rock-face and the ground squelched beneath my feet. It was full of secluded hideaways; dank, magical, musty. It belonged in fairytales with goblins, and when snow-covered, it becomes the remote empire of Hans Christian Anderson's fierce Snow Queen.

Mabel Hookey (1871–1953), journalist, artist, author and traveller, climbed the mountain in 1907 with family and friends and took a series of photographs which can be seen in the viewing pod on the summit.

I bought *The Butterfly Man* (2005) by Heather Rose because it was by a Tasmanian woman, even though the apparent subject did not appeal. It is the imaginary story of what happened to Lord Lucan after the murder of the family nanny in London in 1974 and his disappearance. But it is set most sensitively and evocatively in his house on Mount Wellington, which Heather Rose obviously knows well, and worth reading.

Jane Franklin Hall – Elboden Street

Back on Davey Street, returning towards the centre of town, and on your right, just before Davey Street begins to run parallel to Macquarie Street, turn into Elboden Street, to red-brick Jane Franklin Hall. On this site, from 1839, was Aldridge Lodge, home of Mary Morton Allport and family ('Around and About Macquarie Street', p244). Mary died there in 1895.

Since 1950, Jane Franklin Hall, which took over the site of the house in the 1980s, has been a residential college of the University of Tasmania; (it is about 15 minutes' walk from the University to the West and the centre of town to the east). Think of Jane Franklin as an intellectual in her drawing room at Government House, or as a physical adventurer ascending Mount Wellington.

The poet (Marguerite) **Helen Power** (1870–1957) lived at 3 Elboden Street from 1902, with her sister **Lillian Power** (b1862), after their father's death in Campbell Town where they were born and brought up. The house in Campbell Town was called Mount Joy, now renamed Balvaird and can be easily seen just up from the Information Centre, on the right at the top of Queen Street (no. 14). Helen provided von Stieglitz with some evocative childhood memories for *A Short History of Campbell Town* (1948, 1965).

In Elboden Street the sisters ran a guest house and taught, Helen contemporary literature. Her grandfather, with his wife Agnes Power, were the employers of the convict Anne Battersby at Derwent Water (pp161, 250). And Helen was christened Marguerite after his sister Lady Blessington, whom she was said increasingly to resemble, and whose portrait hung on her sitting room wall.

In 1926, Helen helped the impresario Olive Wilton and playwright Catherine Shepherd (p237) found the Hobart Repertory Theatre Society. Helen became appreciated as a poet only later in life, in the 1950s; earlier, her poetry was not considered 'sufficiently Australian in tone'. Some of her poems – but excluding, unfortunately, those written during the First World War – are available in *A Lute with Three Strings* (1964). She was influenced by the French poets she translated and it is startling to read the lines,

> The bourdon of the steady summer rain
> Falls on my heart like music, full of peace

and hear there the rhythm of the Verlaine Second World War broadcast code, and then to find that poem followed by one called 'After Verlaine'. Like Catherine Shepherd, Helen died in St Anne's Rest Home, 142 Davey Street, which is still there. The Elboden Street property is privately owned and surrounded by a wall. The owner when I intruded was extraordinarily civil, but she has since moved.

Salvator Road (Tasma)

Wiggle your way due north now, via Molle Street to Salvator Road, an extension of Goulburn Road which was once a red-light district and where respectable but poor mothers were much visited by Dorcas members (p133). Right at the very end, when you think you can go no further, is no. 41, a private house, Barton Vale; in Tasma's day, it was called Highfield in Salvator Rosa Glen. You don't need to intrude on the owners to get an impression of what inspired Tasma to write about her childhood home.

Tasma (Jessie Couvreur, 1848–1897) was born Jessie Catherine Huybers in England, the eldest of seven children, to parents of mixed European heritage. The family arrived in Hobart in 1852, and her father set up as a general merchant and wine and spirit seller. He prospered and, in 1866, the family moved to Highfield. Jessie married Charles Forbes Fraser at St David's Church in 1867 but the marriage soon faltered and eventually ended. Her husband had accompanied his parents to various penal postings, including the Cascades Female Factory, which Tasma's biographer suggests may have caused him to view women 'as people without rights'. Tasma was to use that background in her writing (pp68, 284).

Settled in Europe, Tasma married the Belgian politician and London *Times* correspondent Auguste Couvreur and began to concentrate more seriously on her writing. Patricia Clarke tells the full story in *Tasma: The Life of Jessie Couvreur* (1994), and her work is discussed by Margaret Harris in 'The Writing of Tasma: The Work of Jessie Couvreur' in *A Bright and Fiery Troop* (edited by Debra Adelaide, 1988). (It includes chapters on Caroline Leakey and Marie Pitt.)

Tasma wrote about Highfield from memory years later and her heroine, Eila, and the rest of the Clare family in *Not Counting the Cost* emigrate to Europe, as she did. In doing so, Eila leaves behind a husband who has made her life a misery and is confined to the New Norfolk Mental Asylum (p305). The unsatisfactory husbands in Tasma's writing tended to be based on her ex. Though the novel is only partly set in Tasmania, the first 150 pages convey an intense nostalgia for her childhood home. We are, happily, acquainted with the current owners of Barton Vale, and so can say that today's house and garden are not exactly as they were in Tasma's day – rather more up-to-date and kempt – and the setting has been modified by development, but Tasma is still there. Writing of visitors arriving in search of the Clare family, she continues:

They came upon them in the flower-garden – a mere longitudinal strip taken from the hill that sloped upwards from the house. The flower-garden it was called by courtesy, for in the tangle of blooms and weeds that encumbered the soil, there was nothing to recall the trim parterres we have learned to associate with the name. Such as it was, thanks to the Tasmanian air and soil, wherein flowers seem to grow, … for no assignable cause, there was always to be found in the wherewithal to provide a bouquet of fuchsias and geraniums, bordered by springs of fragrant lemon-thyme … The hardy shrubs and gaily-painted weeds and flowers wove a garland of colour and perfume round the assembled party, and across the city, lying at their feet, the sea glittered and sparkled beneath the afternoon sun.

27. Tasma (Jessie Couvreur), from Clarke, *Tasma*

Behind them rose Mount Wellington, described by Tasma earlier in this itinerary. *Not Counting the Cost* is available on the internet, but at a price; one which I felt was worth paying; it may be your only way of reading it. *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill* (1889; 1987), perhaps a better-known novel, and more easily obtainable in paperback, is set in Australia but has nothing to do with Tasmania.

Government House and Royal Hobart Botanical Gardens

Right over the other side of Hobart, to the east, you can hardly fail to notice the neo-gothic Government House up to your right overlooking the Derwent, not long past the bridge on your way from the airport. Tasmania's Governors have lived there since 1858. Before the move, **Eliza Marsh** (née Merewether), a visitor to Tasmania from the Australian mainland in September 1851, set the scene, while staying with Caroline Denison and her husband in the old Government House:

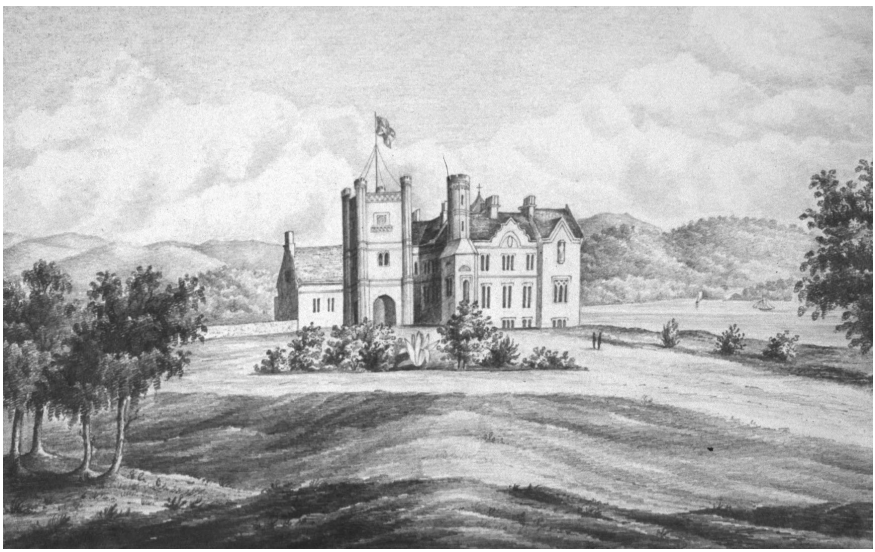
> The view from the new house will be beautiful, looking up and down the harbour, which I think, is very little less beautiful than Sydney, which is considered for scenery and good harbourage surpassing anything in the world. This Harbour is better. The Botanical Gardens are well kept, and very pretty to my eye, being full of English spring flowers. The domain and gardens are about 1½ miles distant from the present Gov. House and when more fully laid out from the mountainous scenery and beautiful views will be delightful.

The first wife to live in the new house, until 1861, was **Augusta Fox-Young** (née Marryat, m1848, d1913). She had previously been with her husband, Henry, when he governed South Australia, and Port Augusta there is named after her, as is Augusta Road in New Town, Hobart (p269). Augusta's husband, governing Tasmania from the time of its 1856 Constitution (p175), did not have a happy time and resigned. Harriet Gore Brown (p200) followed her. And Lady Hamilton's Literary Society and its rows took place here 30 years later (pp206–10). The artist Emily Bowring made at least two sketches in 1858 of the new Government House. Held in the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, they are exhibited from time to time with works by other colonial women artists.

The house is not open to the public, but further along are the Royal Hobart Botanical Gardens, established in 1818, that are well worth a visit. Caroline Denison (p161), last wife to live in the Franklin Square Government House, certainly thought so, as she wrote in January 1847, soon after her arrival and in more detail than her later guest Eliza Marsh:

> At length we arrived at the Government garden, and what a sight was there! The profusion of fruit exceeded anything I ever saw before; plums, of various sorts, dropping and lying about almost in heaps, under every tree; in fact, in greater abundance that we can ever make use of. Pears, apples &c. in proportion; figs, vegetables of all sorts, some English flowers, and some very beautiful native shrubs. The principal of these were, a kind of Mimosa growing quite up into a tree, and bearing little clusters of lilac flowers with a very sweet smell; the *wattle*, a kind of acacia, with a bright yellow flower; the Norfolk Island pine, a very beautiful tree, more like a cedar than a pine, and which, I believe, in its own country grows to an

immense height and size; … amongst all, there appeared the bright green of an English walnut tree, loaded, like every thing else, with fruit, and some very healthy-looking young oaks. Altogether, it would be thought a delightful garden anywhere; and to us, just come off a long sea voyage, it seemed little short of Paradise!



28. (New) Government House, by Emily Stuart Bowring, 1858, courtesy of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office

Some of these plants and trees date from 1838 when Jane Franklin, with Elizabeth Gould's naturalist husband, John, and the colony's leading botanist took shelter in Recherche Bay (p298). They also brought back plants for the Royal Society in London and Jane's gardens at Ancanthe (p270).

The Botanical Gardens are much the same now as when Caroline Denison described them, and they are another place, like so many in Tasmania, where you can roam in quietude. Here you can cast your mind back much further than 1818. Long before 1804, Aborigines established regular camps where English spring flowers now grow, for there were abundant supplies of shellfish from the nearby river.