

# 18 – Oyster Cove to Recherche Bay

## Oyster Cove

Take the A6 south out of Hobart in the direction of Kingston, and pass Snug. That is where Cassandra Pybus bought her uncle's house and, for the whole history of this area – Snug, Oyster Cove, Kettering and Bruny Island where the Pybus family arrived in 1829 – you cannot do better than her *Community of Thieves*.

Richard Pybus was granted 2,560 acres on North Bruny where he took his second wife **Hannah Pybus** and their two children, but the extended family of Pybus descendants gradually had property on the shore opposite. *Community of Thieves* tells the story of the family, the area, those they displaced and those who were briefly their neighbours. Cassandra Pybus constantly returns to the past of her family in her writing and the implications for the Aborigines:

What was done is done ... Those early settlers, my ancestors, were simply creatures of their time, which is to say they were men like other men; no better, nor worse. The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there. Ah, but that is not how it seems to me on this morning ... We have been very happy here in the territory of the Nuenone people. Has any one of us paused to do a reckoning?

Of her home, she writes:

So it is that I now inhabit the landscape of my dreams. I live in the house that was built by my father's brother beside a narrow unsealed road which winds along the very edge of North West Bay and over the hill to descend somewhat precariously into Oyster Cove – Old Station Road, the original road to the Aboriginal station ... I am the last Pybus in the channel country.

The 'Aboriginal station' is what you have come to see; it is what is left of the place where most of the Aborigines transferred from Flinders Island to Oyster Cove in 1847 spent their last days. Chapter 12 of my historical section tells that story.

Oyster Cove is now Aboriginal sovereign territory (Chronology, Chapter 13), so to visit it the same suggestions I make for Risdon Cove apply (p272). Nevertheless, you can stop outside the gate, which may well be locked and look – though there is nothing left of the 1847 buildings – and think. The smell of eucalypt is strong. If you are fortunate enough to be allowed in, or to be taken in, your thoughts may be more profound.

For today's Aboriginal community Oyster Cove is one of the most sacred of their cultural places, where they hold ceremonies associated with the repatriation of human remains and an annual festival. Cassandra Pybus movingly describes attending one, crossing Mathinna Creek – named for

the place where Mathina drowned, drunk and abused (p188) – to do so. A conversation Cassandra had with Carol, a cousin's wife, on that occasion when she proposed writing a book sums up the problem of writing about Tasmanian Aborigines, even for her, let alone an outsider like me; Carol replied sharply:

'First we steal the blackfellas' land, then we deny them an identity and now you want to steal their story for your own intellectual purposes. Don't you think that's just another kind of colonialism?' Carol is enrolled in an Aboriginal Studies degree, by correspondence, in Adelaide. She has a point.

Cassandra wrote the book!

The turning first left after the Old Station is Manuka Road and, on the left, is 'Manuka' on the site of the old Crowther house of that name. It burnt down, like so much of the area, in the terrible fires of 1967. The original was built by the brother of Elizabeth Crowther who married William Blyth and went to live at Bushy Park in New Norfolk (p308). The rebuilt cottage is lived in by Mary Cree and her sister, Crowther descendants. Mary Cree's *Edith May 1895–1974: Life in Early Tasmania* (nd) is the story of her mother, **Edith May Crowther Chapman** (Molly), and the Crowther family. Molly was at his side when her brother William donated his collection of books and other historical materials to the State Library in 1964. In her later years, she lived at 11 Cumberland Terrace, Battery Point, Hobart, and there is a commemorative plaque on the wall outside.

Mary Cree records Molly's first view of the destruction of Manuka in 1967: 'When I got down in the Red Cross car a few days later it was like Siberia – white ash and black stumps.' Old pear trees had survived, however, and blossom appeared the following spring.

## **Bruny Island**

Go now to Kettering. You can either continue along Manuka road, round the headland, or go back to the main road and direct. All the land between Oyster Cove and Kettering used to be Crowther or Pybus land. It is from Kettering that you get the ferry to Bruny Island (15 minutes). There is a pleasant café at the Kettering terminal. The ferry takes you to the north half of an island which is, in many ways, two islands joined by a very slender isthmus.

In *Community of Thieves*, Cassandra Pybus – whose family lands were in the northern part – dates Aboriginal occupation of Bruny Island by the Nuenone band, determined by as yet incomplete archaeological exploration, to 6,000 years. The last of the Nuenone, including the most famous, Trukanini, left with Robinson in 1829 (p108).

Several European expeditions landed on Bruny Island before the beginning of white settlement on the Tasmanian mainland in 1803. François Péron of the Baudin expedition who met Ouray-Ouray at today's Cygnet in 1802 (pp6–8), met another interesting and named woman, **Arra Maïda**, a few days later on

Bruny, though his impression of Bruny Islanders was rather different from that he had of Ouray-Ouray and her family.



35. Arra Maïda, by Nicolas Petit, from Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians*

Péron and his companion came upon a group of 20 women, naked save the odd kangaroo skin round the shoulders, laden with rush baskets of the shellfish they had been collecting. At first scared, the women were persuaded to engage and, indeed, became lively and mocking. Péron proceeds to describe them in unflattering, mostly crude, terms. In ‘François Péron and the Tasmanians: An Unrequited Romance’ (2007), Shino Konishi writes: ‘It was what he said about indigenous people and how he perceived women that offended me.’

At this meeting, the Frenchmen did not take the lead, that was very much Arra Maïda’s role, bossing not only them but the other women when they got nervous. She sang and danced (in a way which Péron found too suggestive for a romantic Frenchman) and covered the visitors’ faces with crushed charcoal, as Ouray-Ouray had done with her own face.

Péron noted of the women that they were ‘almost all covered with scars – miserable evidence of their fierce husbands’ mistreatment of them’, without realising that the scarring may have been created as decoration of cultural significance. This mistreatment was the conclusion he drew when he finally saw the women with their men. The attitude of the Nuenone men may have stemmed from earlier meetings with Europeans, particularly sealers lacking French gallantry and friendliness, or from a colleague of Péron’s who had earlier bested them in bouts of physical combat intended to be friendly.

Whatever the cause, Péron noted of the women that ‘their fierce husbands shot looks of rage and fury at them’. The men also shared out the food placed

by the women at their feet among themselves, without offering any to their women. The women no longer spoke or smiled and kept their eyes lowered.

Péron was to meet Arra Maïda again, this time with a small child on her back, and she was sketched by his companion – a portrait showing ‘that proud, confident nature which eminently distinguished her from all her companions’.

Trukanini was only able to return to Bruny Island after 1847 and then just for short visits from Oyster Cove (p191). But her ashes are scattered in the channel in between (p231). When you reach the isthmus, driving south from the ferry, you will see a natural mound called the Hummock. At the top of the steps is Trukanini Lookout with spectacular views. Well worth the climb. And at dusk on the shore below, you can watch fairy penguins returning, often in phalanxes, to their burrows.

If you decide to stay at a guesthouse on Bruny (as we did many years ago at the Mavista Cottages) you will want a good book to read for lazing on idyllic beaches where once Aboriginal women roamed collecting shellfish or from where they dived into the depths for them. Your best bet is beautifully-conceived and written *The Alphabet of Light and Dark* (2002) by Hobart-based Danielle Wood. It was inspired by the adventures of her grandfather, the lighthouse-keeper at Cape Bruny, on the southernmost tip of the western part of South Bruny.

Twenty-nine-year-old Essie, the novel’s main character, returns to the lighthouse when her grandfather dies, and describes the beginning of that journey:

Bruny Island follows Tasmania like a comma, a space for pause. The ferry chugs towards it, along the dotted line that is drawn on maps across the channel at one of its narrowest points, leaving behind the town of Kettering and its harbour cross-hatched with jetties and the masts of yachts.

What follows is full of history, yearning, romance and tension.

### Nicholls Rivulet

If, instead of driving on to Kettering to take the ferry to Bruny Island, you had taken the right-hand turning opposite Oyster Cove, you would have driven inland taking a short cut to Cygnet and come upon Nicholls Rivulet. This is Fanny Cochrane Smith territory (p119), and her descendants still live in the area. She had eleven children with her British husband and taught them traditional Aboriginal skills and respect for their ancestors. From Oyster Cove, Trukanini and other Aborigines living there would visit Fanny and be culturally refreshed.

Fanny gave half an acre of her land for a wooden Methodist chapel and raised money for its construction in 1901 by holding picnics, concerts and parties; she saw it as a bridge between the Aboriginal and colonist communities. It still stands and has been restored by the South Eastern Tasmanian Aboriginal

Corporation as the Living History Museum of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage to celebrate the ways in which Fanny maintained the culture and tradition of her people. The museum is open from 10.30am to 14.30pm seven days a week, excluding public holidays.



36. Fanny Cochrane Smith wearing a shell necklace, courtesy of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (ch18p4)

## Cygnets

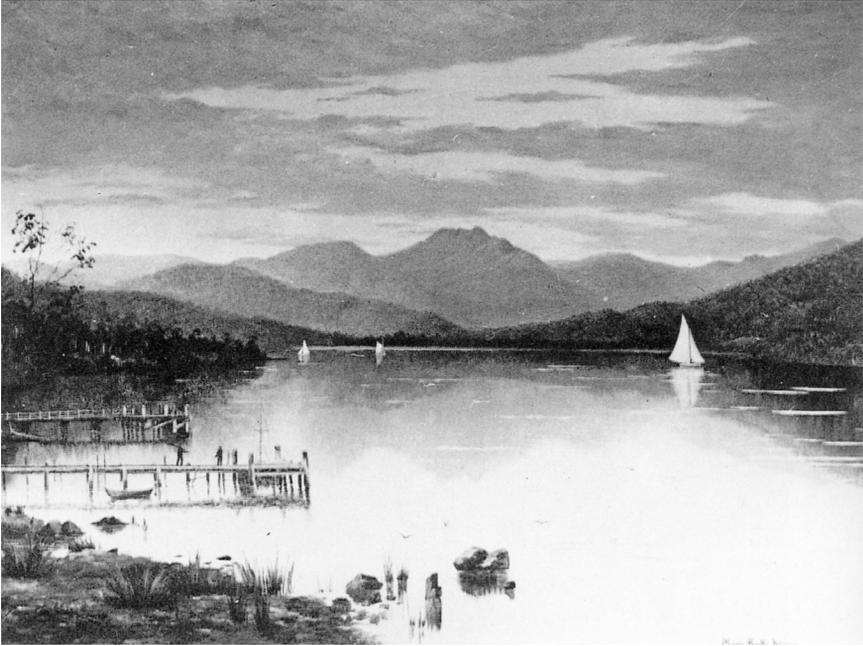
Nicholls Rivulet is not far from Cygnets at the head of the Port Cygnets inlet. Before the township was a gleam in anyone's eye, this is where in 1802 François Péron and his comrade met Ouray-Ouray of the Melukerdee band (pp6–8).

## Lymington

Drive from Cygnets down the west shore of Port Cygnets and, two thirds of the way along, just before the bend into the mouth of the Huon River is Lymington. This is where Isabel Dick (p309) was brought in 1908 by her new husband Ronald, son of a former tea planter in Ceylon. He had trained to be an orchardist, but fruit growing at Lymington was a constant struggle and, in 1913, he took Isabel and their two children back to England to farm; but, in 1915, he died suddenly. Isabel returned to Tasmania and lived in Sandy

Bay, Hobart (p250); and there, to earn her living, she started to write more seriously than previously.

She set the early novel *Huon Belle* (1930, 2008), published under the name Charlotte I Dick, around Lymington. From the Huon Valley, that is, from the south, part of the Wellington Range of mountains is known as the Sleeping Beauty or the Huon Belle – the profile of a giant woman lying on her back. Marie Bjelke Petersen's version gives a fair impression. Seen from the Derwent Valley to the north west, the image shifts and the same part of the range is named by its constituent peaks.



37. 'Sleeping Beauty' (Huon Belle), by Marie Bjelke Petersen, from Alexander, *A Mortal Flame*

CA Cranston has described this novel by Isabel Dick, a member of the hop-growing Shoobridge family introduced in the next itinerary, as offering 'an eco-feminist perspective on intrinsic and economic values of land'. But for Virginia (Ginny) Lee, child of nature, who has wangled a job within sight of the Huon Belle, it is less intellectual:

There was something utterly tranquil in the attitude [of the Huon Belle]; and something infinitely peaceful, tolerant, beautiful in those guarding mountains had affected the little bush girl so deeply that it was just as she had said, she had *got* to live within sight of it; of that maternal dignity, brooding, as the massive figure did, above the lives of those who worked out their days in its shadow. She was too ignorant to express even to herself

the reason she was so affected by the mountains; she had never heard the words lure, enchantment, infatuation; wouldn't have understood them if she had, for she was only a country-bred girl, parented (it was rumoured) by a hardworking timber hand and an immigrant Scotswoman who had found her way to Tasmania, and there ... lived and died.

Having obtained her heart's desire to gain employment on an orchard within sight of the Huon Belle, Ginny has to fight to retain it. 'The patriarchal order', as CA Cranston has it, 'is replaced by the primacy of feminized and productive nature.' Again, less intellectually, the ending is a bit soppy!

## Franklin

From Lymington, you can take the long way round, up the west bank of the Huon River, or go back to Cygnet and take the cross-country main road to Huonville. Then drive down the west bank to Franklin. You can also drive direct from Hobart, 47 kilometres on the Huon Highway.

Coming into Franklin on the left is a boat yard. There in 1992 former academic John Young and his wife Ruth Young established a boat-building school which was bought in 2000 by a not-for-profit local community organisation and renamed the Wooden Boat Centre. The Youngs then ran the Living Boat Trust for children with special educational needs. The first boat built at the school in 1992 was the *Lady Jane Franklin*.

In the forecourt of the Boat Centre on a freestanding notice board is the following text, or was when I jotted it down in 2006:

Not content to sip tea in government house, Lady Jane Franklin pursued her interests in science, education, exploration and agriculture during her husband's term as Governor. She was one of this districts first landowners, taking 644 acres near here in 1837. Lady Jane Franklin made frequent visits to her property sailing in her ketch the *Huon Pine*. Before leaving the colony in 1843, she also encouraged improvements to the rough track to Hobart although it was not passable by carts and carriages until the 1860s.

Jane bought the land for £700 from John Price who, a year later, in 1838, married her niece Mary Franklin (p145). In 1839 she started distributing it to poor and honest settlers, interviewing every applicant before handing over the 100- or 50-acre allotments, and keeping one for herself.

The settlement was not an immediate success, the settlers were so poor, but Jane was determined and paid £300 for the construction of the *Huon Pine* for 'the service of my new settlement', which she called Huon Fernlands. She also had a chapel built in 1839; today's 1864 St John's is on the site of the earlier St Mary's.

When Jane bought her acreage, widower John Clark had just settled on the riverside, one of only three settlers in the area, at what was to be called Woodside. He was also to manage the neighbouring allotment Jane kept

for herself and he and his family were to play a major part in her last visit to what became Franklin. In *Woodside Descendants* (1991), Douglas Clark describes relations between Jane Franklin and the Clarks. He also charts who took which Franklin allotment and when they moved in.

The relationship started early. On 19 September 1838, 14-year-old Eleanor Franklin noted in her diary of a trip up the Huon:

A heavy hail shower drove us in at Clarke's property. He is so industrious that with the help of another man ... he has built a hut, cleared a great deal of land and sown some potatoes etc in 12 months. It is impossible to get through some of this scrub without a hatchet.

As early as the spring of 1838, Clark had planted fruit trees obtained from Government House. When I visited Woodside in 2007, I was taken to see a pear survivor (Black Aachen) – another of Jane Franklin's many Tasmanian trees. It still blossoms and fruits every year. Naomie Clark also showed me the exquisite tea set bought by John Clark in China for his first wife and handed down over the generations to Naomie, though too fine a porcelain and precious to be used. In 1841, Clark began to build a proper house on the site of today's homestead.

On 20 April 1843, in the Huon chapel, he married **Sarah Kellaway** (b1825), whose family had arrived in Hobart in 1834 and settled on the other side of the Huon. The couple had been earlier recognised as man and wife until someone arrived to marry a waiting group. Their first child (of ten) was born on 21 June that year and, on 5 November, she was christened in the Huon chapel by Bishop Nixon with Jane and John Franklin in attendance. They had already left Hobart after John Franklin's recall and were at the beginning of their journey back to England; they met their ship at the mouth of the Huon. Jane's diary records the christening:

The Bishop on saying, 'Name this child.' Received the answer:

'Jane Franklin Louisa' – 'What?' said the Bishop. It was repeated, the Bishop's eyes twinkled and the sweet little baby which had one of the finest pair of eyes I ever saw received its names. Mrs Clark assured me it was not she who desired it, meaning she had not the presumption to ask it, but her husband who would like it so called. I had myself told him that if it would give him any pleasure to give it my name, I would be glad if he did so.

The sleeping arrangements for that night still cause amusement in the Clark family. Jane wrote: '[Clark's] wife and the baby had gone to her father to make more room for us. Clark slept by the kitchen fire and the remainder of the accommodation was given up to us.' That was the women in the party; John Franklin slept on the *Huon Pine*. As well as her name, Jane also gave the baby a Bible and prayer book suitably inscribed, and she had brought a joint of meat for the family. Jane Franklin's sleeping quarters that night were demolished in 1912, but today's house is on the site of the original. It

was lucky not to have been burnt down in 1967 when the raging bushfires approached very close.

At the time of the Second World War there were 2000 fruit growers in the Huon Valley; there are now only about 150, the Clarks – father, daughter and granddaughter - being one of the families. Their property is raised up above the road that runs along the river half-way between Franklin and Huonville, with ‘Woodside’ writ large on a blue corrugated roof. You don’t need to disturb the family should you stop at the wayside shelter and buy bags of Woodside apples and pears. Who knows, some may be ancient Black Aachen. You can see the house at the top of a short drive.

As for Jane Franklin, it would be nice to think that the idea for a memorial on the Glebe in front of what was the Huon chapel will soon be given substance. Marianne North gives an impression of Franklin in 1881:

Franklin was a damp feverish swamp. The winters were very long, and strangers seldom came to cheer them. It had been an old convict-settlement, and the place and people had a bad name; wrongly, for they were a most sober, peaceable community. I asked if the people were better off than at home, and was told that out of a hundred cottages I should not find one without a piano! though the master was a mere labourer, and no instrument could be had for less than £30. Wages were very high, and the fruit-shops so abundant that a large profit could be made every year by the sale of the surplus fruit.

The piano is significant, for it is from this background and this area that Amy Sherwin, ‘the Tasmanian Nightingale’, sprang (pp237, 247); indeed, in the 1860s, Amy, still a child, helped rescue the family’s piano from a forest fire that burnt down their homestead.

The town of Franklin fell into the doldrums after 1929, when local government moved to Huonville and road transport replaced river, but has recently recovered owing to a real community spirit initially prompted by a conservation campaign. Activity, much of it led by women, takes place at the Palais Theatre, formerly the Town Hall. The town’s decline and beginnings of rejuvenation are neatly covered in John Young’s ‘Back to the Future: Choosing a Meaning from Regional History’ (1995). There are at least two good restaurants: Petty Sessions (the old court house) and Aqua Vita. They may have changed hands.

## Dover

Further down the Huon Highway from Franklin is what used to be called Port Espérance, the name of one of the ships of the d’Entrecasteaux expedition that took Louise Girardin to Recherche Bay (p3), next and last stop on this itinerary, in 1792 and 1793.

In the centre of Dover is a cenotaph topped by an Australian soldier and engraved with the names of the fallen but, on the plinth beneath, is a metal plaque which reads, touchingly misspelling her name:

To commemorate Girardin first white woman who arrived disguised as an officer of the d'Entrecasteaux expedition 1792–93 unveiled by Minister Industrial Development Hon SCH Frost 3.1.76 donated by APH Ltd.

This unveiling took place before Paddy Prosser of Dover became a Louise Girardin activist (p4). I met her in 2006 and kept in touch. In 2008 she wrote to me of Louise:

She now has a lane named after her on the hill just behind the cenotaph in Dover. Some friends of mine are developing the land and they fought the local council tooth and nail for the right to give her name to a little street. She also lives on in other ways, I am continuing my work with students teaching them the d'Entrecasteaux story. Louise's tale always seems to engage them and we have had some wonderful discussions about the times, her character, motivation and tragic end. When I have an all girls group I dress up one of them in 18<sup>th</sup> century female garb including wig, hoop skirt and corset and challenge them to various tasks. I use Louise's life to illustrate the difference between the role of women in the 18th century and today. We have lots of fun and the point is made with laughter, music and story.

Louise started life as Marie Louise Girardin, one of nine children of a former gardener at Versailles who became a wine merchant. In 1776, aged 22, she married a café proprietor at Versailles; their baby died in 1778 and she was widowed in 1881. At the beginning of the Revolution she fled home in disgrace after giving birth to an illegitimate child and arrived in Brest as a youth with a letter of introduction that enabled her to gain employment as steward in the expedition about to set out. As a steward, Louise was exempt from medical examination and had a cabin of her own. Paddy Prosser's play (p4) tells this story, and that of the rest of her life.

Louise's tragic end occurred after the expedition had left Recherche Bay and headed towards Batavia. During that journey she is believed to have formed an attachment, as a woman, with a young ensign on the *Recherche* but, following news of the King's execution, the expedition broke up. They both died of dysentery in December 1794. The ship's surgeon revealed her true gender.

### **Recherche Bay (pronounced 'Research')**

Driving from Dover to Recherche Bay we played the CD bought at the bakery in Dover, 'Song, Satire and a Big Dose of History', composed and sung by the Recherche Baybes: Paddy Prosser, Deborah Wace and cellist Anna Spinaze. Tracks include, 'Girardin Jive' and 'Louise's Song' – all clever and great fun.

Six days after I met Paddy and bought the disc, the Huon Valley Australia Day Awards recognised the trio for their community work.

The road beyond Southport, south of Dover, is quite hard going, though it may have improved, and you wonder if you have gone wrong somewhere. But persevere. Suddenly you come out of the miles of dark trees and into a wide open bay flooded with light. No one had warned us how beautiful it is. There are some houses here; ignore them and continue round the first bay and part of the way round Rocky Bay. Park at a sign saying 'Whale Walk 10 minutes return' and 'Fishers Point 2 hours return'. The huge whale sculpture looking out to sea is worth a diversion, but then return to the track you passed on your right.

Follow the track through an enchanted wood until you come to a cove where surely Louise Girardin set foot. That, anyway, is what Louise activists believe for it is here that the photograph of the Recherche Baybes on the cover of the disc was taken, and where Louise's duel with the beastly chief pilot was re-enacted – a scene from Paddy Prosser's play 'The Strange Journey of Louise Girardin' – during the Art on the Beach Festival in 2005, part of the anti-logging campaign (p4). A photograph of the duel – with the French actor Annick Thomas playing Louise – is to be found in Bruce Poulson's *Recherche Bay: A Short History* (2005).

If you are lucky, though, you will be alone on that beach and you may feel that you have found paradise.

Of course, long, long before Louise Girardin and her compatriots set foot at Recherche Bay, the Lyluequonny people roamed free there. Trukanini was born at Recherche Bay in about 1812 (p108). Following the murder of her mother during her childhood, her stepmother was kidnapped, it is said from Recherche Bay in 1829. Robinson reported that it was by those who mutinied on board the *Cyprus* taking shelter in the Bay. But his report is the only evidence for this. Trukanini's father told him that 'soldiers' had taken her and that they had gone to England in a ship. But, as Robinson explained, soldiers could also mean armed seamen. However she disappeared, she did so at that time.

The captain of the *Cyprus* was Lieutenant William Carew, newly arrived in Tasmania and in charge of the 63rd Regiment taking 31 hardened convicts to Macquarie Harbour (p59). The mutineers forced 43 passengers ashore, including Mrs Carew, her two children (one of them a babe in arms), two servants (a woman and her husband) and some of the convicts before sailing off. The castaways, particularly Mrs Carew and her maid, were treated courteously by the 'pirates' and no one was manhandled, which may suggest that Trukanini's stepmother was kidnapped by other white men, perhaps on Bruny Island.

Mrs Carew helped build the coracle that allowed a party to set out for help. She was a clever needlewoman and knew how to cut out and fit material. She also had a pair of scissors with her. They were all eventually rescued, Carew to be court-martialled, but exonerated. The full story, as far as the facts are available, is told in *The Pirates of the Brig Cyprus* (Frank Clune and PR Stephensen, 1962).

Jane Franklin and her party also took shelter in Recherche Bay in 1838 on their way to Port Davey where she wanted to see the progress made on the ketch *Huon Pine* she had commissioned (p145). She wrote of the site of the *Cyprus* castaways: 'I believe the landing place in question was the W point of the most western of the coves which I have called Lucas Cove.' Lucas was their pilot and she also named a rivulet after him because he had been shipwrecked with her husband in Australian waters in 1803.

Jane's description of the environs of Recherche Bay ties in well with the successful twenty-first-century campaign to prevent logging and otherwise preserve the environment of the area, including the 1792 French Garden which she had sighted and which was rediscovered in 2003 by environmental activists Helen Gee and Bob Graham. Jane wrote:

I was struck as we moved along with the dense gloom and blackness of the woods as they rose immediately from the shore upon the outer base of dark-hued rocks. Over these the mountains behind Research Bay presented a noble and singular outline. I thought the French writers who expatiate so much on the terrible and severe aspect of nature in these Austral regions were not so much in the wrong.