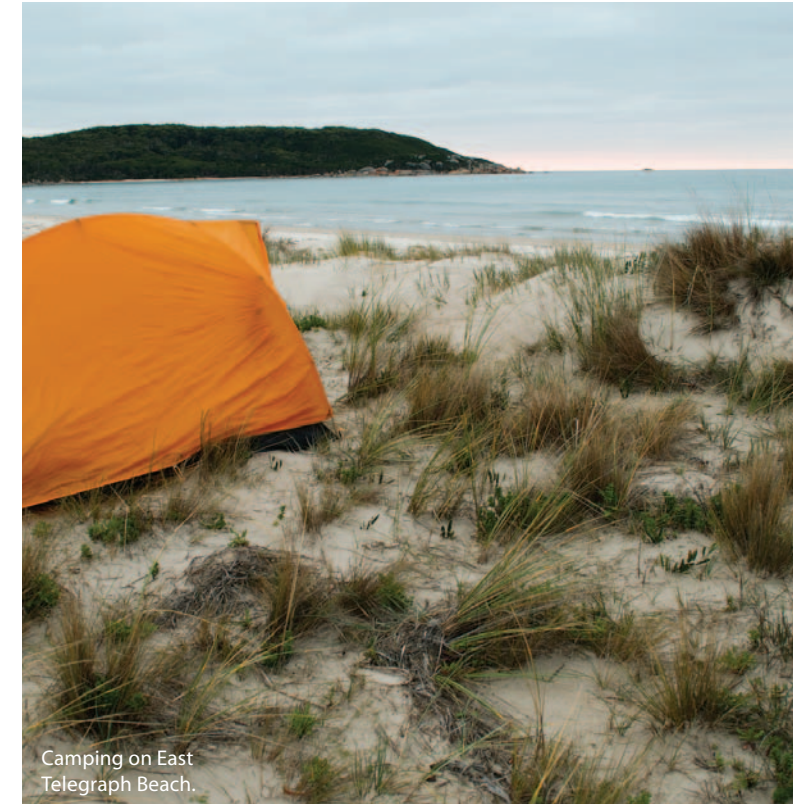




Three Hummock's Italian vibe

When one of Italy's most famous sons reached the island in 1852 he was so struck by its beauty he went on to create his own paradise back in the Mediterranean.

A shearwater rookery in the island's southwest.



Camping on East Telegraph Beach.



My boots outside the workers' cottage.



A Cape Barren goose in all its inquisitive glory.



A sea spray rainbow over the managers' house.



Overlooking Eleanor's Bay.

Bev watches for snakes in the shearwater rookery.



“Garibaldi discovered ‘the clearest, the most poetical of brooks, where we quenched our thirst with delight’.”

“How often has that lonely island in Bass Strait deliciously excited my imagination, when, sick of this civilised society so well supplied with priests and police-agents, I returned in thought to that pleasant bay...”
Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882)

Giuseppe Garibaldi is considered by many to be the unifier of modern Italy. In 1852, while in command of the trading ship *Carmen* during a period of political exile, Garibaldi sailed past the south coast of Australia. He touched the country's soil only once – on the rather obscure northwest Tasmanian island of Three Hummock. There he found a flourishing vegetable garden, an empty farmhouse and a grave.

Island life

Few humans have ever lived permanently on Three Hummock. Even prior to European settlement the people of the North West group would only hunt on the island over summer, having swam from the mainland of Tasmania via Hunter Island.

Rock carvings, middens and petroglyphs remain as evidence of their relationship with the island. Bass and Flinders renamed it in 1798 and claimed it for Britain. Since then, small colonies of friends, families and workers have temporarily established themselves on the island for varying periods of time.

By the mid-1800s a 40-acre pastoral lease had been established on the southwest corner of Three Hummock. This lease has never expanded and, apart from a few unsealed access roads, walking tracks, an airstrip and light stations, the remainder of the island appears to have been barely encroached upon. These 7,000ha became a nature reserve in the 1970s and have been state reserve since 2001.

When Garibaldi arrived he found a “little one-storied dwelling-house, rough, but comfortable, carefully built, and furnished with tables, beds and chairs” all recently abandoned following the death of one of the island's three inhabitants.

The man's gravestone explained that: “the husband and wife unable to bear the loneliness of the desert island, left it, and returned to Van Diemen.”

That house no longer exists and the oldest dwellings are two 1910 prefabs – an old workers' cottage and a homestead – which are now the alternative accommodation options to camping on the island. The most recently constructed house was built in 1940 and is occupied by the current managers, Beverley and John O'Brien.

New kids on the block

Over the decades, racehorses, herds of sheep and cattle have been run and bred on the leased land, none of which really worked out. The last cow left in 1999 (possibly via the human digestive tract), the terrain proved unsuitable for Phar Lap and friends, and the sheep run wild and free on Granite Hill. Much of those 40 acres is now marsupial lawn. Other birds and animals more easily adaptable to the environment have also been introduced to Three Hummock, such as Forester kangaroos, Cape Barren geese and peafowl.

Due to land clearing and shooting, Foresters were a threatened species in Tasmania by the 1970s and, as a result, some were relocated to Three Hummock, Maria Island and Narawntapu NP.

The melaleuca, banksia, leptospermum and eucalypt scrub and the open grassland clearings provide an ideal habitat for Foresters. In fact, the grass airstrip near the settlement seems to be their favourite hangout.

Cape Barren geese's ability to survive on brackish water allows them to stay on offshore islands all year round. The resident peacocks, the general collective term ‘ostentation’ is most fitting, unarguably add a certain je ne sais quoi to the environment. These birds join the purple swamp hens and 90 or so other species native to the island, including breeding seabirds and shorebirds such as little penguins, sooty and pied oystercatchers, hooded plovers, Pacific gulls and shearwater or ‘muttonbirds’ as they continue to be locally known.

Fair trade

Although the managers' responsibilities do not technically extend beyond the 40-acre lease, they treat the state reserve as a natural extension of it and try to keep walking tracks clear and drive visitors wherever they want to go. Their sense of what a ‘guest’ is seems incredibly flexible.

A person visiting Three Hummock Island intending to just hike and camp will still be met on arrival at the airstrip or the dock and offered a VHF radio, a printout of the weather forecast and a sketch map. If you're planning to walk right around the island you'll probably also be offered a lift for the first 10km of the track towards East Telegraph Beach, which is the fairly monotonous access road to the Telecom Airstrip section they call ‘the highway.’

If you book at least one night in the relatively inexpensive heritage accommodation and take over a bit of fresh fruit, some chocolates or a bottle of wine then Bev and John will do what they can for you.

Camping on the island is free and can be done anywhere outside

the 40-acre lease. Walking options on Three Hummock are hugely varied. There are short walks to beaches and wetlands, medium walks in the southwest of the island to lookouts and coastal features, and an inland track that takes you all the way around the island. This track passes the three hummocks of South, Middle and North and offers a number of side tracks out to the coast.

Walking the entire island in an anticlockwise direction seems the most logical way in terms of most easily locating tracks. From the homestead, East Telegraph Beach is 23km and a great first night's camping spot. If it's warm weather you won't even need a tent.

Garibaldi discovered “the clearest, the most poetical of brooks, where we quenched our thirst with delight, and found an abundant supply of water for the voyage”. This was probably the spring that

comes out on Home Beach where the geese can be seen having a drink. Water from this spring is pumped to a holding tank and gravity fed to the accommodation.

Although there are apparently springs all over the island, such as at the northern end of West Telegraph Beach, they can be difficult to locate and creek beds are often dry. The O'Briens leave me water in a strategic location so that I can collect it after my first night out at East Telegraph.

The only way is up

After returning to the main track from East Telegraph Beach, Cape Rochon is about another 15km north. The track is an overgrown access road lined by tall scrub, but you do get a peek at the



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A cold sprint at a secluded cove.

100m high Middle Hummock to your right and the 160m North Hummock to your left on your way to this northeast cape. The island's highest point is South Hummock at 237m.

Garibaldi was so taken with Three Hummock Island that in 1855, when all that political madness was over, he purchased the island of Caprera off the Sardinian coast in the Maddalena archipelago for a retreat.

Named for its wild goats ('capra' meaning goat in Italian), it was there that Garibaldi spent most of his retirement. Caprera's highest point is only lower than South Hummock by 25m. There are also aesthetic similarities between the islands' rock-rimmed beaches.

At Cape Rochon, which is another good camping spot, there is a lightstation and a muttonbird rookery, both of which take a bit of scouting around to find. There are several rookeries on Three Hummock. The practice of muttonbirding, around March and April, was and continues to be an important practice for Aboriginal Tasmanians.

Among many things, such as hunting for good tucker, it helps families to reaffirm their indigenous identity and connection to their community.


Other muttonbird rookeries exist on Three Hummock: at Eleanor's Bay in the island's southwest, about seven kilometres from the homestead; and Ranger Point at the northern end of West Telegraph Beach. A permit can be bought from Parks and Wildlife for seasonal muttonbirding at this rookery at Ranger Point. In the hotter months, the rookeries are a likely place to see a tiger, the island's only snake species.

The home stretch

From Cape Rochon you can reach West Telegraph Beach by returning to the side of North Hummock and following the main track, which twists and turns with the terrain, towards the west coast.

West Telegraph is one long sandy slog of around four or five kilometres, but you can probably organise to get collected by the O'Briens somewhere along the way if you've pre-arranged it, the tide is far enough out and you remembered the choccies.

Thirty years after his visit to Three Hummock, Garibaldi died on Caprera. A pine forest now covers the island and it is believed Garibaldi planted the original saplings in an attempt to recreate the "lofty trees of a century's growth" of Three Hummock. Caprera has also been declared a natural reserve for the royal seagulls, peregrine falcons and cormorants inhabiting it.

And now, over a century and a half since the revolutionary's visit, recorded with great nostalgia in his autobiography, Three Hummock's beauty and sense of remoteness seems to have barely changed. 

Elspeth Callender was a guest of Three Hummock Island and Tourism Tasmania.

Walk notes

THREE HUMMOCK ISLAND, TAS



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Getting there

For a large group or an excess of gear, boats can be chartered from Smithton. Otherwise, chartering a light plane from Burnie Airport (in Wynyard) is the most economical transport option. Planes can also be chartered from Melbourne and helicopters from Stanley. Alternatively you can kayak or sail to the island.
www.threehummockisland.com.au

Walking there

Signs are limited in the north of the island and the tracks, which were once access roads and may one day be again, are seriously overgrown. Though deviating from the bushy paths will serve to build your appreciation for them as the scrub is very dense. A GPS is advisable as is a mild love of bush-bashing.