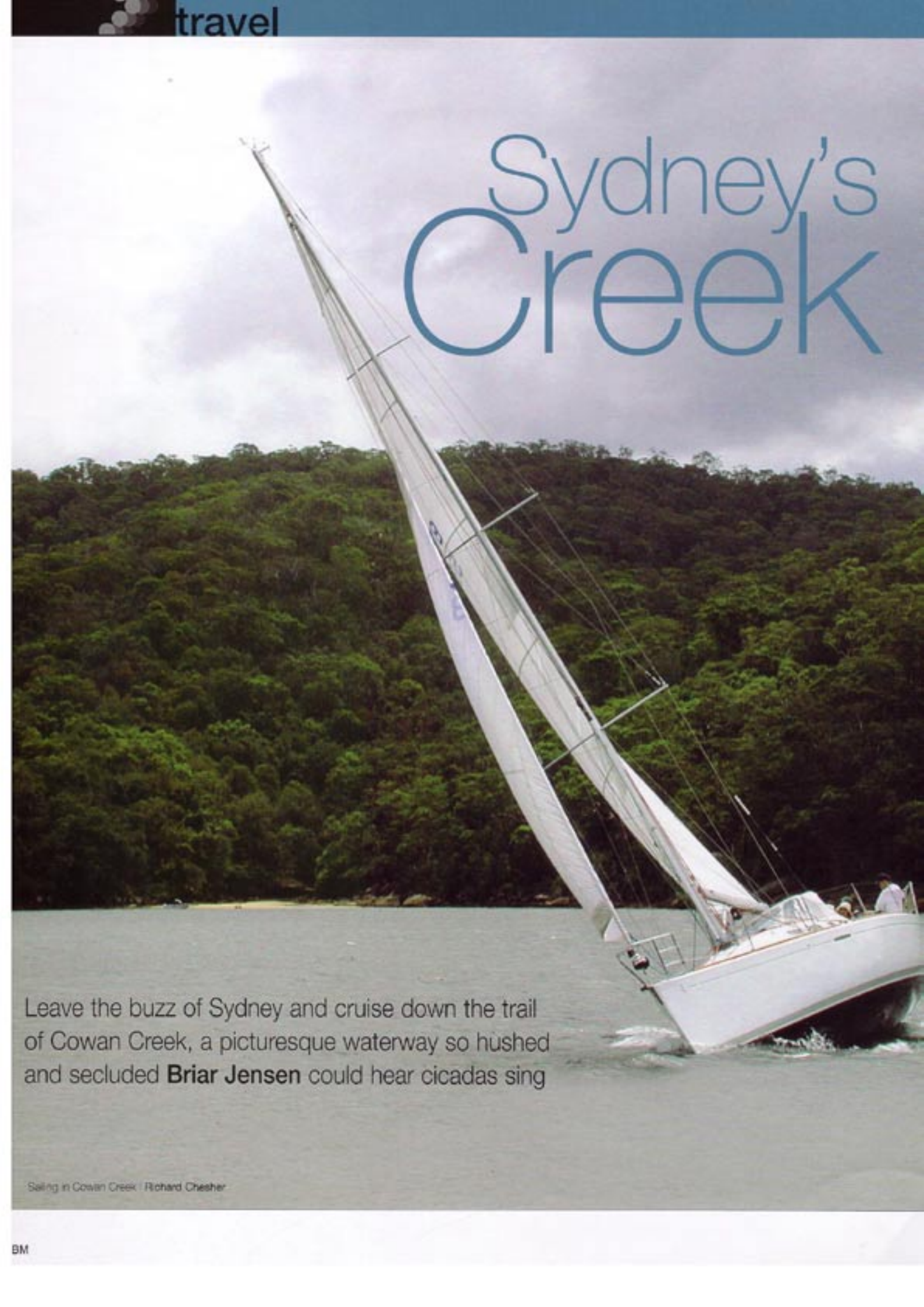


Sydney's Creek



Leave the buzz of Sydney and cruise down the trail of Cowan Creek, a picturesque waterway so hushed and secluded **Briar Jensen** could hear cicadas sing

Sailing in Cowan Creek / Richard Chesher

If you find yourself in Sydney on business or for pleasure, there are myriad tourist activities to undertake in and around Sydney harbour. But if you're a man with a sense of adventure and are looking for something 'off the beaten track', then consider cruising Cowan Creek. In contrast to Sydney's bustling harbour, this cruising ground is so tranquil it is hard to believe it is only a 40-minute drive from the centre of Sydney.

Cowan Creek and its many tributaries carve their way through picturesque Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park on the northern outskirts of Sydney. Created by the flooding of steep-sided valleys at the end of the ice age, this waterway is surrounded by rugged bushland and offers the perfect location for a relaxing weekend getaway or leisurely week-long cruise.

Cowan Creek is a tributary of the Hawkesbury River and flows into Broken Bay, a harbour just north of Sydney. 'Creek' is definitely a misnomer – it is a majestic river with an expansive entrance. Unlike the adjacent Pittwater, Cowan Creek is completely surrounded by a national park with only tiny pockets of civilization that provides places to restock supplies or enjoy fine dining.

Eucalypt trees cling to the steep sandstone cliffs. Rock sculptures, formed by wind and tide, line the shore before plunging deep into the creek. Despite its dark emerald appearance, the water is so clear you can see the fish swimming under your boat. The sound of cicadas and native birds fill the air, and you may even find a 'laughing' kookaburra paying a visit to your boat.

The waters are deep and easily navigable, and the surrounding cliffs provide protection from the wind. There are numerous public moorings located throughout the waterway, though if you can set an anchor, you can pick your own spot well away from other boats. There are a

variety of charter vessels available for cruising the area, either motor or sail, monohulls or catamarans. While only one company resides within the waters of the national park, a variety of businesses operate from nearby Pittwater. While some sailing experience is required for bareboat yacht chartering, no experience is necessary for hiring powerboats.

A goanna on Halletts Beach | Briar Jensen

If you are sailing around from Pittwater your first stop will most likely be Refuge or America Bays. These large sheltered bays are home to many private moorings and at the height of summer are filled with craft of all shapes and sizes. The small beach at Refuge surrounds a waterfall that tumbles over a sandstone precipice before pummeling the rocks at its base. It provides an invigorating natural shower surrounded by moss and ferns. If you're feeling energetic, you can climb to the top of the waterfall for a stunning view over the bay. Keep an eye out while you climb, as you might be lucky enough to spot a wallaby. Refuge Beach is tidal, so if you find it underwater, it is worth coming back later.

There are lots of other small sandy beaches punctuating the rocky foreshores. Halletts Beach always has some sand, even at high tide, and it's a great place to explore rock pools as the tide ebbs. This is also the place to see goannas, the native lizards. They will often visit your picnic, when least expected, so keep the lid on your food basket. If you don't feed or provoke them, they will soon amble back into the bush.

While onboard, listen out for the sound of a ringing



Patterns in the sand at Halletts Beach | Briar Jensen



Power Cruising in Cowan Creek | Richard Chesher

bell. During holidays and summer weekends, several small boats cruise the waterway selling newspapers and ice creams. There is even a Cappuccino Cat selling gourmet coffees. Just give them a wave and they'll pull alongside.

However, if you feel like eating ashore, then head to Cottage Point. This pocket of private dwellings, in the middle of the national park, forms one of Sydney's smallest suburbs. It is worth cruising past just to see the innovative architecture used to secure the multilevel houses to the steep, narrow, rocky blocks of land.

Cottage Point Kiosk, adjacent to Kuring-gai Motor Yacht Club, provides a complimentary mooring for short visits, and is an excellent spot for a delicious light meal. If you're eating on the veranda, take a look over the railing into the water where you'll see schools of fish waiting for titbits. A look at the old photographs adorning the walls will give you a pictorial history of the area. The Kiosk also carries a variety of supplies should you run out of anything onboard.

For a more formal dining experience, visit Cottage Point Inn. This fully licensed restaurant features modern Australian cuisine. Savour the stunning water views, as well as the food, by eating on the expansive deck. You might be able to pull up to their pontoon, but if the seaplane has beaten you to it, just anchor nearby. (Make sure your anchor is secure



d'Albora Marina nestled in Akuna Bay | d'Albora Marinas



Rocks at the base of Refuge Bay Waterfall | Brier Jensen

though – some hapless diners have had to interrupt their lunch midway to rescue their drifting vessel.)

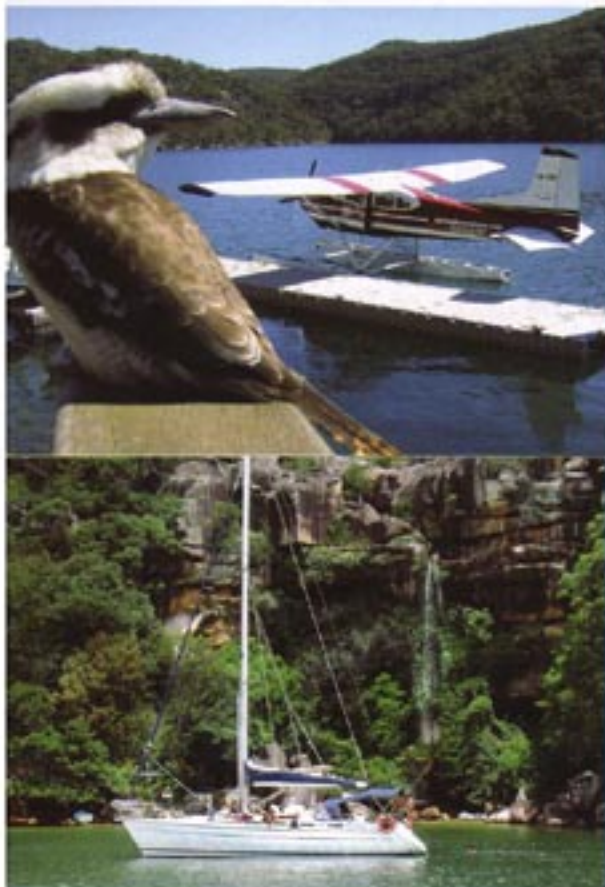
Cruise up Coal and Candle Creek and you will find d'Albora Marina. Nestled in tiny Akuna Bay, this world-class marina offers all the facilities a cruiser could need, from showers and a Laundromat to a general store, cafe and restaurant. Visit on a Sunday and you can eat your takeaways on the pontoon while listening to live music, usually a jazz or blues band. Upstairs is Akuna Aura, a licensed restaurant featuring modern Australian, seafood and Japanese dishes. You can eat on the balcony overlooking the marina and admire the craft below.

For some easy onshore exploration, follow Cowan Creek to Bobbin Head. As well as Halvorsen Marina, you will find the Park Information Centre and Wildlife Shop where you can pick up free maps of the area or purchase a variety of souvenirs. Past the

expansive picnic area is the Gibberagong boardwalk which meanders through the mangroves, just above the mudflats. If you follow the track beyond the boardwalk, you will eventually come to the site of some authentic Aboriginal engravings.

If you crave seclusion, then head for Smiths Creek. There are three tiny bays in which to pick up a mooring, or you can drop an anchor in the creek itself. Here, there are no signs of civilisation, other than the occasional fellow cruiser. Take the dinghy and explore the head of the inlet, as far as the depth will allow, then start walking. You will usually be rewarded with a hidden waterfall and sometimes a rock pool for freshwater swimming.

Fish are plentiful throughout the creek, though not always easily caught. But hanging a line over the stern is a relaxing way to pass cocktail hour while dinner is cooking in the onboard BBQ.



Top: A seaplane in front of Cottage Point Inn
| Sydney by Seaplane

Bottom: Moored in front of the waterfall, Refuge Bay
| Richard Chester www.cruising-broken-bay.com

Cowan Creek is best explored from the water but if you are short of time, it is possible to capture the essence of its beauty through a fly-and-dine package. Leaving from Sydney Harbour or Pittwater, a seaplane will provide a scenic flight over the area then deliver you to Cottage Point Inn where you can dine overlooking the water. Or if you prefer, they can supply a gourmet picnic and fly you to Halletts Beach, picking you up three hours later. (If you want to have the beach to yourself in the summer, go on a weekday.)

It is possible to cruise Cowan Creek at any time of the year. The sweltering heat of summer is easily soothed in the cool waters. Spring and autumn showers bring the added beauty of spontaneous waterfalls tumbling down the cliffs. And when the early morning fogs of winter lifts to reveal the surrounding bushland, it is easy to believe you are alone in the wilderness.

GUIDES

- Visit www.cruising-broken-bay.com for excellent maps, photos and information. Includes satellite photos for a great perspective.
- John & Jocelyn Powell's book *Cruising Guide to the Hawkesbury River and Cowan, Broken Bay, Pittwater* should be onboard most charter boats. If it's not, buy a copy at Cottage Point Kiosk or the Park Information Centre Bobbin Head. Includes points of interest and historical information as well as maps.

Charter Boat Companies

- Church Point Charter, Pittwater
Tel: +61 2 9999 4188
Email: niels@netspace.net.au
www.churchpointcharter.com.au
- Clipper Cruiser Holidays, Akuna Bay
Tel: +61 2 9450 0000
Email: the.crew@clippercruisers.com.au
www.clippercruisers.com.au

- Club Sail, Pittwater
Tel: +61 2 9979 9669
Email: info@clubsail.com.au
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- Cruising Cats, Pittwater
Tel: +61 2 9999 1400
Email: info@cruisingcats.com.au
www.cruisingcats.com.au
- EOS Yacht Charter / Skipper-a-Clipper, Pittwater
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Email: enquiries@skipperclipper.com.au
www.eosyachtcharter.com.au
- Pittwater Yacht Charter, Pittwater
Tel: +61 2 9997 5344
Email: info@yachtcharter.com.au
www.yachtcharter.com.au

Hint: If you are planning on going ashore frequently or enjoy exploring in a dinghy, then ask for a dinghy with an outboard motor.



A gourmet fly-dine picnic at Halletts Beach
| Sydney Seaplane



A break sail - Club Sail

Seaplane Companies

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