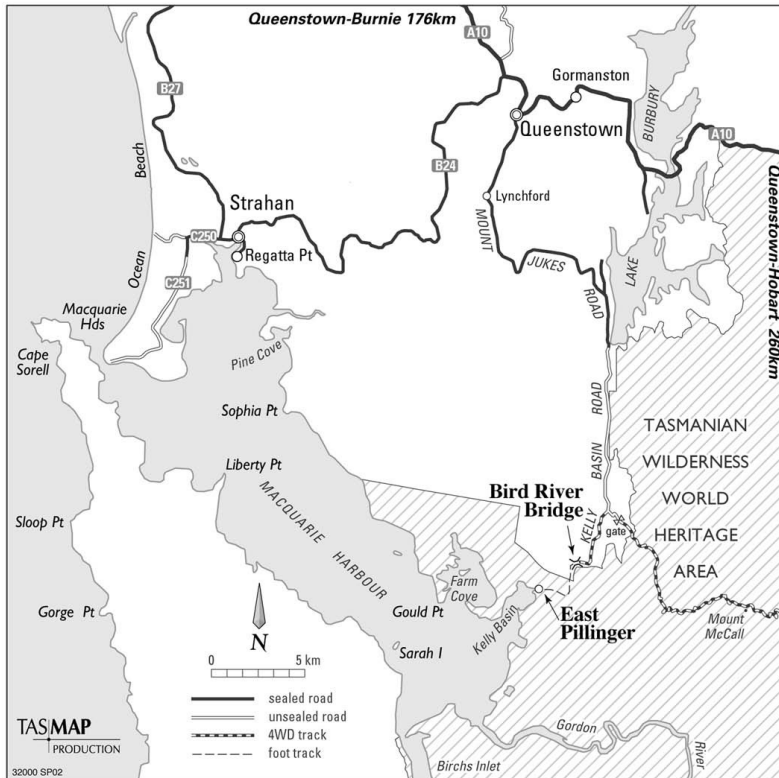




East Pillinger HISTORIC TOWNSHIP



The North Mount Lyell Company was formed by James Crotty in 1897 in direct competition with the Mount Lyell Company. After formation Crotty quickly set about building his own company's infrastructure including the mine at Linda, smelters at Crotty, port and industrial facilities at East Pillinger, a settlement at Darwin and a railway to connect them all.

The Rise

The population of the area grew rapidly. By 1898 hundreds of men were employed constructing the railway and company facilities. At East Pillinger these included three long wharves, a sawmill and brickworks, an ore crushing plant, railway and shipping terminus, workers huts, mess hall and company offices.

A government town, complete with stores, hotels and a police station was established at West Pillinger, adjacent to the company town at East Pillinger.

Standing in East Pillinger in the very early 1900s you would have been in the midst of a bustling port town. Railway carriages loaded with timber, bricks and ore would be shunting past, the sound of shouted instructions ringing out and the smell of wood-smoke hanging thickly in the air....

Today, East Pillinger is a peaceful place. Most of the town has been reclaimed by the forest. There are however some substantial and fascinating relics awaiting your discovery and the walk from Bird River Bridge to East Pillinger is highly recommended.

This area is part of the Macquarie Harbour Historic Site and within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Early days

The port town of East Pillinger was established at Kelly Basin on the shores of Macquarie Harbour by the North Mount Lyell Copper Company in the late 1800s.

The Fall

The prosperity wasn't to last. James Crotty died in 1898 in London and with him went much of the vision for the North Mount Lyell Company. The company merged with its competitor, making half the infrastructure redundant. Strahan was chosen over East Pillinger as the preferred port. Some people remained at East Pillinger harvesting timber and servicing the ships and trains that called in from time to time. The company gradually dismantled and removed most of the buildings and railway infrastructure. The town's last permanent residents left in 1943.

How to get there

Bird River Bridge

From Queenstown drive south along the sealed Mt Jukes Road for 29 km. At this point the road surface changes to gravel and it becomes the Kelly Basin Road.

Follow the Kelly Basin Road for 11 km to the Bird River Bridge turnoff. It will take approximately one hour to travel from Queenstown to this point.

Those travelling in 2WD vehicles will need to park at the turnoff and walk the final five kilometres (allow about an hour) along the Kelly Basin Road to the Bird River Bridge. The road follows the alignment of the railway line and provides level, easy walking although it can be wet. Those travelling in 4WD vehicles can drive this final section of Kelly Basin Road. The track is quite narrow in parts so please travel slowly and watch for other vehicles.

Vehicles, including mountain bikes, are not permitted beyond the barrier on the northern side of the Bird River Bridge.

East Pillinger

The walking track from Bird River Bridge to East Pillinger continues along the alignment of the railway track. At times the track becomes almost tunnel-like, with a dense growth of ferns, mosses and other plants on either side. Contrasting sharply with the green of the rainforest is the deep-brown tannin-stained water of the Bird River which flows beside the track for much of its length.

There are a few short sections of uneven ground due to past land slips along the track, otherwise it is level and easy. Walking boots or strong shoes are advisable as it is often wet underfoot. Allow 3 to 4 hours for the return walk to East Pillinger, plus a couple of hours to explore the relics. Boat-based visitors can reach East Pillinger via Macquarie Harbour. The distance from Strahan is 35 kilometres. Macquarie Harbour can experience rapid and dramatic weather changes which can make boating conditions dangerous so check the forecast before you depart, watch the weather whilst you are out and carry appropriate safety equipment. The tannin-stained water in the harbour makes it difficult to see underwater hazards, so it is important to obey all navigation markers.

There is a public jetty at East Pillinger. Visitors to East Pillinger do not require a permit or a Parks Pass.

What to see and do

Bird River Bridge

For more than a century, this trestle bridge has stood in proud testimony to the people who built it. Most of the timbers, including the Huon pine piles, are original.

Along the track to East Pillinger

When walking the track between Bird River Bridge and East Pillinger you will encounter reminders of the area's past. These include embankments and cuttings constructed for laying the railway line, occasional sleepers and sections of line, a wooden water tank, sections of telegraph line and a series of wooden bridges.

At East Pillinger

Three brick kilns, a jetty, two steam boilers, a railway carriage and the mess hall chimney are all that remain from this once bustling port town. A short loop walk links the various relics and interpretation panels provide more information about each of the relics.

Camping and toilets

There is a bush campsite and toilet at East Pillinger near the public jetty. At the Bird River Bridge there is a day use area but no toilet or camping facilities.

Fires

East Pillinger is within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area which is a fuel stove only area. Open fires are not permitted.

Things to remember

During February to April bee hives are located in this area for the production of leatherwood honey. Please do not interfere with the hives.

Pets can disturb native animals and are not permitted in the Historic Site.

Keep wildlife wild. Let them feed themselves.

The relics in this area provide an important link with our past. Please do not disturb them. If items are moved or removed their potential to tell us about the past is reduced, as is the enjoyment of other people who visit the site.

Guns and hunting equipment must be left at home.

Kelly Basin is part of the Farm Cove Game Reserve.

This Reserve is open to licensed duck hunters from March to June each year

Further reading

David Bannear, 1991. King River to Kelly Basin Archaeological Survey. Occasional Paper No 29. Department of Parks Wildlife and Heritage and Forestry Commission Tasmania.

Further information

Parks and Wildlife Service,
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