



Tora Time

Words and images by Vivienne Haldane

Viv Haldane explores Tora on the southern coast of Wairarapa



The view from Linda's garden

The thing about travel is that it's not always predictable. And when your plans don't exactly turn out the way you imagine, adopting a flexible attitude – pulling out a Plan B, or creating one on the spot – becomes part of the adventure.

That's the way it was when we went to Tora, on the wild southern Wairarapa coast recently. Glen and I booked in for an overnight stay at the Farside Cabin on Riversdale Station; a 10,500-acre property owned by Ben and Georgie Lutyens.

I chose the cabin because of its

description, which is said to look out "over the vast Pacific Ocean towards the rising sun." As it turned out, it was more like sinking fog.

Tora is probably one of this coast's most remote beaches, being a 40-minute drive from Martinborough. It has become well known for the Tora Coastal Walk and recently, Tora Station featured on an episode of perennial TV show, *Country Calendar*.

While trying to figure out where we were supposed to be going, we spotted a farmer beside his beachside woolshed

and stopped to get directions. The farmer turned out to be Alistair (AKA 'Tora') Boyne, owner of Tora Station. How did I know this? There can't be many farmers who sport dreadlocks. Besides, I'm a fan of *Country Calendar* and remembered that episode in particular.

The Farside Cabin is one of three places to stay on Riversdale Station. Managers Linda and Garry Buchan live just 200 metres from the cabin. Garry's a bulldozer driver and maintains the tracks on their property.

"You'll come to a clearing and a track.

Head up there, then go left and that will take you to the top of the ridge," Tora tells us.

Sure, what could be easier? We bumped over the paddock and soon saw a narrow dirt track winding around the side of a hill. It was very steep, not fenced and with a big gully below.

It was about then that I got the jitters. We drive a short way and decide it's not for us. Yes, we're in a 4WD vehicle; it should do the trick. But on this precipitous track, our hearts were in our mouths, so we backed down carefully

and decided what to do next. Plan B could be to find another place to stay, or make this into a day trip only.

I admit to cursing slightly. All enquiries to this location should come with a warning: not for the fainthearted.

But to be fair, Linda had pre-warned us, saying, "The track to the cabin is very steep."

She'd put us off coming a few weeks previously because wet weather was forecast as well, which would have made the drive in much too dangerous.

As we had no way of letting Garry and

Linda know our dilemma, we decided to head back down the road in search of Tora, to see if he could get hold of them. I'll admit we felt a bit sheepish (pun intended) at turning back.

We hadn't counted on Tora's mighty powers of persuasion however. He's an affable guy and easy to talk to. He and wife Jenny used to be part of the Tora Coastal Walks organisation, but now they focus on Jenny's cooking classes (they have guest chefs too) and accommodation as a sideline to farming.

Tora grew up here. His father Bob



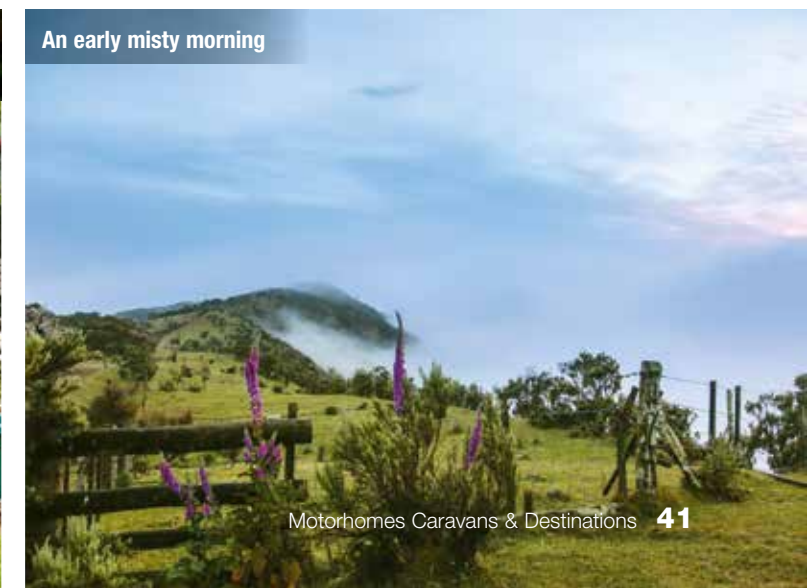
The Farside cabin



This sums it up



Garry and Linda Buchan



An early misty morning



I think 'tis time to retire Myrtle



Tora Station owner, Alistair (Tora) Boyne and son Sam



Traffic jam Tora style



won the farm in a Soldier's Settlement Rehabilitation Block ballot in 1951. Tora and Jenny have raised their four children here and their son, Sam, farms with Tora. Another son, Ben, works with a local commercial fisherman.

Tora kindly offered to go and get Garry. Before he does so, he tells of what a lovely garden Linda has created. "You'll enjoy it up there; the views are incredible."

Tora shot up the track on his quad bike, disappearing in a cloud of dust, dreadlocks flying.

Back he came with Garry – a man with a big smile and twinkly blue eyes.

"Of course it's safe, we come and go all the time," he said, answering my question. I felt more than slightly foolish.

So off we went with Garry to have a look and decide whether we'll stay or not. The day trip option is winning at this stage.

Having rattled three kilometers through the bush (the dirt track soon turns a corner into the bush, which is actually not so scary) we reached the top, which is 300m above sea level. When we gaze at Tora (the beach that is, not the farmer), it was love at first sight.

"Yes, we'll stay," we decided unanimously. The cabin, as advertised, is rustic but cosy and had everything we need to be comfortable.

Linda showed us around her garden and we marvelled at how she's created so green an oasis in such an exposed setting.

All was well with this plan, until about 30 minutes later when fog swept in over

... I notice I'm craning my head into the middle of the car to avoid looking out over the edge

the hilltop like a ghostly shroud and stayed there for the next 24 hours. It was a splendid view if you like a whiteout. Then it began to rain and didn't stop all night. Glen and I both wondered if perhaps Plan B (the day trip option) would have been wiser.

Garry and Linda have lived at the end of this remote track for 23 years. Garry bulldozed an area, brought in a caravan, and later constructed their prefabricated house. They don't have electricity but run a generator for power. It's peaceful and quiet and that's what they like about it.

"We don't get too many visitors, especially not women – the track puts some people off," Linda tells me, which immediately makes me feel I hadn't been

so chicken-hearted after all. She drives out to go to town once a week, so it's no hindrance in her view.

The next morning nothing had changed, so we packed up and go to say our goodbyes, only to be told, "Sorry, it's not possible to drive down the track today. It's too dangerous."

We phoned around to let everyone know our whereabouts. Linda gave me a couple of books and we retreated to the Farside Cabin. There's nothing like a day of enforced rest and relaxation. Later, Linda invited us in for happy hour then sent us away with food to cook for the night.

A day later, Garry gave us the okay to leave, which we did in slow convoy.

At one stage, nervous about the ground ahead, I got out and walked for a bit, but with mud up to my ankles I decided getting a ride was the better option and hopped in with Garry and Linda. I notice I'm craning my head into the middle of the car to avoid looking out over the edge.

Finally back down at sea level, we agree we'd had an excellent adventure. We farewelled our kind hosts and drove along the coast as far as Te Awaiti Station at the northern end of Tora. Along the way we saw small groups of walkers doing the Coastal Walk.

Glancing back to where we stayed, tucked amongst the bush, wisps of cloud were still clinging stubbornly to the hilltop. ■

Find out more about Tora Station at torastation.co.nz.

Looking towards Te Awaiti Station

