

# South Australia

A NATURAL ADVENTURES SPECIAL PROMOTION



## Tales from the river bank

Bruce Elder takes a trip along the mighty Murray.





# Where legend greets the sea

The setting of a celebrated Australian novel is tended carefully by its indigenous owners, writes **Bruce Elder**.

*Storm Boy lived between the Coorong and the sea. His home was the long, long snout of sandhill and scrub that curves away south-eastwards from the Murray Mouth. A wild strip it is, windswept and tussocky, with the flat shallow water of the South Australian Coorong on one side and the endless slam of the Southern Ocean on the other.*

**S**o begins Colin Thiele's *Storm Boy*, one of Australia's best-loved children's stories. Since 1966 the book and the film (released in 1976) have evoked and defined this wild, beautiful area where the Southern Ocean blows up sand dunes so steep and so high that even four-wheel-drives have trouble traversing them.

On a headland known as Hacks Point, overlooking the shallow southern reaches of the Coorong (180 kilometres south-east of Adelaide and 25 kilometres south of Meningie), is the Coorong Wilderness Lodge. It enables visitors to experience the culture of the indigenous Ngarindjeri people, who still fish and live in the area.

"This is what we have been wanting ever since we arrived in Australia," says Willi, an engineer from the Baltic port city of Kiel, as he listens to George Trevorrow, owner-manager of the lodge, explain the creation story, myths, culture, fauna and flora, politics and customs of the local people. Trevorrow's account of the travails of the Ngarindjeri resonates with Willi, who belongs to a German ethnic minority known as Frisians.

The genius of the Coorong Wilderness Lodge is in its balance between informality, knowledge and tradition. Each of the beautifully appointed cabins has been designed in the shape of the Murray cod, an important totem for the Ngarindjeri.

On the edge of the Coorong are a dozen kayaks so visitors can paddle across to the Younghusband Peninsula sandbars, where emus wander elegantly through the shallows.

Every day, for as long as it takes, Trevorrow will sit in the lodge's restaurant showing videos, telling local stories and patiently answering questions. He has been at the forefront of attempts to have Aboriginal

bones and skulls returned to Australia from European museums and, as the elected leader of the Ngarindjeri nation, is the living repository of its history and culture.

An extended stay at the lodge includes a short bush tucker interpretive walk, during which the traditional foodstuffs and medicines of the region are explained. There's a visit to the Camp Coorong culture museum just a few kilometres north of the lodge (run by members of the Trevorrow family), which has old photos, woven baskets and bark painting, a historic collection of boomerangs and local woodwork.

There is a four-wheel-drive journey to the southern end of the Coorong, where at a place known as "42 Mile Crossing" the mountainous dunes are traversed by Ngarindjeri guides, who tell the stories of ancient middens and describe the ease with which locals lived on the cockles just below the sand at the edge of the Southern Ocean.

The region is alive with kangaroos, wallabies, lizards and snakes. Near Chinamans Well, it is possible to walk into the scrub and observe a metre-high mound where the mallee fowl buries and hatches its eggs.

## Eco-cruising

Only recently has the Spirit of the Coorong, a comfortable 14-metre flat-bottomed boat, returned to its full cruise schedule around Coorong National Park. It now leaves the main wharf at Goolwa, passes through the barrage that separates the ocean's salt water from the Murray River's fresh water, stops at the mouth of the Murray so visitors can watch the Southern Ocean

breaking into the lakes, continues down Younghusband

Peninsula, where at Godfreys Landing it is possible to cross the

narrow peninsula, walk

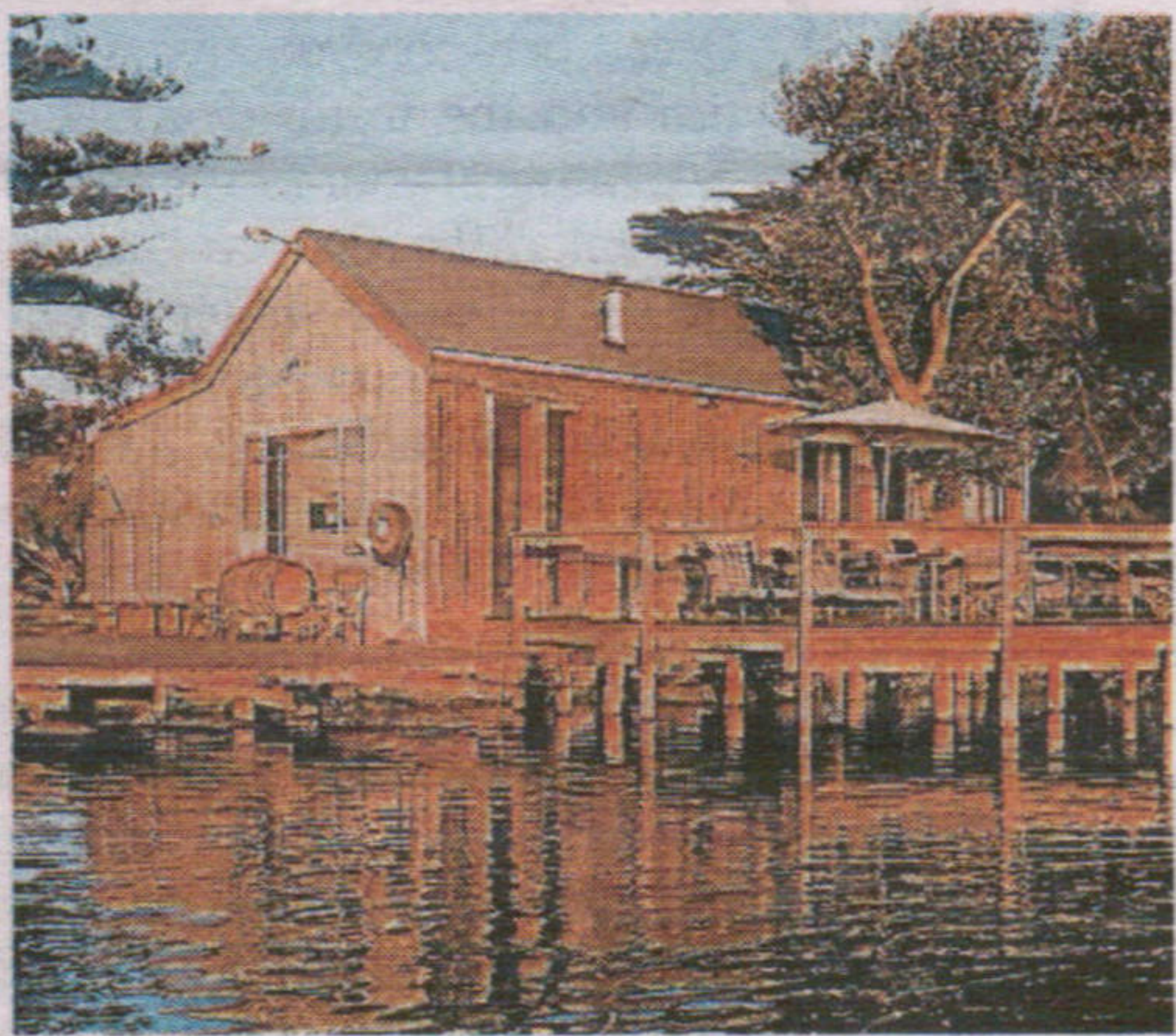
down on to the beach and search for cockles along the shoreline.

The cruises include lunch, afternoon tea and an informative commentary. Expect to see many of

the region's 200 bird species, including black swans and pelicans. Coorong Discovery Tours last 4½ hours (noon-4.30pm)







**Wild country ... (top) the mouth of the Murray River at the Coorong; wilderness lodge owner George Trevor; and the Boathouse at Birks Harbour. Left: a sharp-tailed sandpiper.**

and cost \$78 for adults; Coorong Adventure Tours go for six hours (10am-4pm) and cost \$92 for adults. For more information, see [coorongcruises.com.au](http://coorongcruises.com.au) or phone 1800 442 203.

### Birks Harbour

About one kilometre from the centre of Goolwa, on the banks of the Murray River, is a near-perfect accommodation option – the Boathouse at Birks Harbour. Water laps underneath the greying timber cottage, verandas surround it and boats jangle in the marina outside the front door. It's about as perfect as any holiday beside the

water can be. For what it is worth, it is my favourite get-away-from-it-all destination in Australia. Phone (08) 8555 0338 or see [birksharbour.com.au](http://birksharbour.com.au). Rates are \$250 a night and \$1500 a week.

### Goolwa dining

For years locals and visitors have acknowledged the Whistle Stop as the best restaurant in Goolwa, serving South Australian local produce at its best.

This is the kind of restaurant you would expect to find in Adelaide or in the state's upmarket winery areas. Phone (08) 8555 1171.