



## Ways and means

All you need is a map and a good appetite before setting off on the Poacher's Way trail that meanders from restaurants to wineries and galleries in the NSW Southern Tablelands. **Jane Adams** reports.

There is considerable incongruity in the name chosen for the popular Poacher's Way tourism trail that connects several of the small rural communities surrounding Canberra, a regional self-drive discovery package showcasing artisan food producers, winemakers, chefs and restaurateurs, and crafts-folk. And the reason has nothing to do with eggs.

For me, poaching resonates strongly with DH Lawrence and other English writers including Shakespeare, said to have been charged for deer poaching in Stratford, a resourceful practice typically linked to the illicit acquisition of fish or game. While foraging for free wild food is a brand new discovery for some contemporary Australian chefs, it is not recommended along the Poacher's Way. Talking to 'Way' instigator Susan Bruce, proprietor of the eponymous Poacher's Pantry and smokehouse in Hall, ACT, one soon deletes images of canny hunters and gatherers, braces of pheasant and jugged hares, turning rather to the idea of gastronomic pilgrims and their pathways, and images of Spain's renowned Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

"Initially, when I started Poacher's Pantry, the region's tourism efforts focussed solely on wine, so I organised a group of local businesses for a low-key start to what has evolved into the Poacher's Way," explains Susan, while cajoling sheep to leave her rose garden. The fledgling Southern Tablelands food trail took a great leap forward in 2008 when the Poacher's collaborative received a \$500,000 federal government regional tourism TQual grant used to initiate evocative seasonal magazine-style brochures, a website and professional promotions.

Boasting 25 members, the Poacher's Way package offers experiences that range from truly regional meals and wine tastings, to cossetting guest houses and colonial B&Bs, art and craft galleries, gardens and a day spa. Compared to 'El Camino', Poacher's Way pilgrims have it easy. Just jump in the car and head off across the rolling countryside to Grazing in Gundaroo, where chef Tom Moore and his talented team dish up home-grown kitchen garden local produce driven meals with nurturing care and flair. This reinvigorated 1865 historic inn also features an unashamedly regional wine list, a flash chook-house for the Australorp flock, and a farm shop stocked with local artisan foods for take-home memories. On the shopping list – Lambert Vineyards verjuice, La Barre and Alto Extra Virgin oils, Pankhurst wine chutneys, plus excess Grazing garden produce, tea blends and jams. Gundaroo also boasts the rustic 1872 Colonial Inn wine bar, a great spot for sundowners on the wrap-around veranda; the Cork Street Gallery Café, once the police station, now serving gourmet pizzas and homemade cakes in lieu of sentences; and to rest your head, grandma's era Mallee Gum Cottage.

On the western perimeter, the Way stops include the Crisp family's glass studio in Bowning, and the 1847 Georgian inspired Globe Inn in the heart of Yass.

Host Annette Walters epitomises the story of many of the Poacher's Way proprietors, who have forgone busy city lives to wake up to bird song and country mornings.

Annette was a nurse manager in a major Sydney hospital; Susan Bruce a stockbroker and banker; Anne Caine proprietor of Lerida Estate winery a Canberra-based lawyer; John Kirk founder of the renowned Clonakilla vineyard a research scientist, and Sally Milner of Pialligo Estate Wines, a publisher.

Their collective tree-changes and shared philosophies are the basis of the appeal of the Poacher's Way experience. Its marketing slogan 'Live Life Well' and boast of 'real people living their dream' reinforces that positioning, and offers an authentic memory-making experience.

"Most Canberrans are now ambassadors," claims Susan Bruce, who sees the next project stage is to shift the marketing focus to Sydney and Melbourne. "It's an easy three-hour drive from Sydney, a shorter trip than to Orange or Mudgee," she stresses. Susan Bruce sees neither region, nor the Hunter, as competitors because of Poacher's Way proximity to Canberra and the fact that its attractions are located on every road into Canberra.

When asked why the trail also includes Canberra stops, Susan is pragmatic.

"We considered this, but the trail's popularity means demand for accommodation exceeds our members' capacity."

So Way-makers can stop by Silo Bakery in Kingston for a hearty breakfast or a restorative meal at Podfood in Pialligo near Canberra Airport before hitting the road.

Susan, who championed the project from the outset, puts its success down to the authenticity and quality of the experiences offered by its like-minded operators, who also cite numerous business benefits from their collaboration.

Her own Poacher's Pantry has grown substantially since 1991 to encompass the country smokehouse, a vineyard and Wily Trout wine label, a café and function facility.

"Back then my brother, a chef, noted there was very little artisan smoked meat in Australia. It was a niche waiting to be filled," she remarks.

Now the Pantry larder boasts smallgoods including lamb, kangaroo and emu prosciutto, smoked racks of Hilltops region lamb, smoked chicken and duck breasts, products that have also flown high on Qantas business class menus.

[www.thepoachersway.com.au](http://www.thepoachersway.com.au)

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‘Poach: to take game or fish illegally; to encroach on another’s rights.’

*Macquarie Dictionary*

