



A gal needs shade

Penny's caught between a rock...

Evening light

Benmore stretch into the distance, where the Southern Alps explode out of the horizon. I eat a surprisingly tasty lunch of last night's tuna pasta and lie down to cloud-gaze amid a symphony of crickets.

see the Southern Cross start its nightly curveball across the sky. By 6.30pm I'm tucked up in bed; my torch has failed so, having nothing better to do, I pray for extra beauty sleep as I drift off to the sound of canvas whispering in the wind.

BATH TIME

Back on Penny's Peninsula and it's time for a wash. I haven't showered in a few days and am starting to offend even myself, so, feeling like a jungle-woman, I wrap myself in a sarong, tiptoe into the lake, take a deep breath and squat. Aieee... it's freezing! But I feel surprisingly liberated as I pour cupfuls of water over my hair and scrub my nether regions amid such natural beauty. You never know, perhaps some of it'll rub off on me?

My pitch wasn't part of an official campsite, but rangers don't mind this as long as you pay the correct camping fees at a Pay Station.

I spend the next couple of days exploring, reading, writing and rejuvenating. Over my morning cuppa on the fourth day, as I'm packing up to move on, I reflect on the fact that it's been days since my last proper conversation (talking to myself doesn't count). I've been so removed from the demanding world of cellphones, TV, internet, work and other people, and feel lucky to have snatched some wholesome "me" time. Camping is the perfect way to shed life's complexities and it's a great reminder that food, water, heat and shelter are all you really need.

The day slips away in a purple fanfare and I stay outside just long enough to

TRIP NOTES

Getting there
Lake Aviemore is located on State Highway 83, 95km inland from Oamaru.

The cost
The Waimate District Council operates four large campsites around the lake. Camping costs \$12 a night for a site (up to two adults and four children). Pay the ranger or at one of the many Pay Stations around the lake. Campsites are basic but have toilet facilities.

When to go
Camping season runs from October to early May. School holidays are busiest.



Lovely Lake Aviemore



Pitch perfect

Three adventurous women discover camping isn't just for kids

SOLO CAMPING, LAKE AVIEMORE, SOUTH ISLAND

WHO WENT: Penny Jones, 30

BREAKING FREE

I awaken stifflingly hot and try to move, but I can't. I wriggle hard and claustrophobic panic sets in as I realise I'm immobilised in a Houdini-style knot of bedding.

With an almighty effort, I free my right arm and execute a yogic whole-body flip to reach the zip. Refreshing air floods in and gives me the impetus to perform some precision bum-thrust-leg-kicks (yes, that's the official term), to manoeuvre my chrysalis out onto the grass. As I pant my panic away and cool off in the breeze, I realise I broke the first rule of camping – always pitch your tent in the shade.

I'm camping solo beside Lake Aviemore in Canterbury. From my newly claimed-and-named Queendom of Penny's

Peninsula, I have 270° lake views. I spent ages cruising around the lake yesterday looking for my perfect pitch and fell in love with this small peninsula immediately. It's got everything: soft flat grass, enormous sky and a strategically positioned toilet bush. Perfect!

It's a magic morning: the vivid turquoise hue of the water offers a striking contrast to the yellow and red splashes of autumnal trees; there's a sprinkling of snow on the peaks behind the lake; and a few fluffy white clouds decorate an otherwise uniformly blue sky. I fancy exploring some of the nearby hills so I fire up the stove for a quick cuppa, fetch my milk and yoghurt from the fridge (lake) and devour a fruit-and-muesli breakfast.

DAM GOOD

My walk starts at Benmore Dam, at the northwest end of Lake Aviemore. The incredible earth dam curves across the valley in a wave of brown grass and as I walk across the deserted top, I marvel at the water swirling from the power station below. The dam is part of the Waitaki River hydroelectric system and generates a phenomenal quantity of power, most of which surges to the energy-hungry North Island. It's funny to imagine the megawatts beneath me zapping off to boil the jugs of Auckland from this peaceful place.

A medicinal dose of chocolate gives me a boost up the hill, and I zigzag through tall pines before reaching the top. What a view! The nooks and crannies of Lake