

## When you're running on empty

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A feast of great food experiences awaits hungry drivers on the highways out of the city.

What is it about carbohydrates and carburettors? Seems the minute your feet hit the accelerator, your stomach and palate hit the food button in your brain. If you're like me, you simultaneously trace your route and your eating destinations as you touch the screen on your GPS or unfold an old-fashioned map.

We all have our favourite pit stops. For Sydneysiders, a trip north was never complete without pulling in to The Oak Factory at Hexham and sampling the milk bar. Stories of school trips always mention this monument to dairy goodness.

Heading up the Pacific Highway also swings you into pie territory. This one-handed meal keeps the sprint in the driver with its combined rush of carbs and protein. Fredo Pies and Heatherbrae Pies always crop up as places to get the lidded pastry beauties that will fill you up (see breakout).

South of Sydney, the tummy starts to get rumbly around Berry and, like a Homer Simpson flash from doughnut heaven, thar she blows, the magnificent Berry Donut Van, with its famous cinnamon doughnut and infamous coffee. Mmmmm.

While you're dunking your doughnut, you won't be able to miss the Berry Woodfired Sourdough Bakery, with its veranda stuffed full of motorists munching on pastries, breads and quiche or tucking a loaf under their arms and heading back to their cars.

For those who regard a road trip as a gastronomic pilgrimage rather than a fast-food race, a well-set table is worth the detour, as the Michelin Guide used to say.

Gourmet touring needn't be a marathon event, however. You can eat well on the road, whether it's a quick stop or a long lunch, a relaxing glass of pre-prandial wine or a family-friendly dinner at the end of the day.

Here are some hidden gems, old favourites and must-stops when you're on the road.

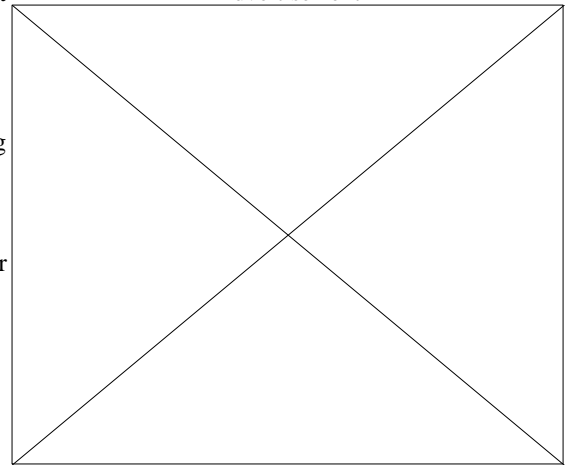
### NORTH

Ocean Restaurant, The Entrance

A motel with a fine-dining restaurant? Love it. Jutting out over the beach with ocean frontage that would make a developer weep, this modern, minimalist room puts up a seasonal menu with lots of ambition, regional produce, urbane twists and capable service.

A coastal reverie. Seven days 12-2.30pm, Mon-Sat 6-10pm.

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### Utopia Cafe, Bangalow

This heritage hinterland town is one of the funkier in Australia and the aptly named Utopia, with its white walls, dark floorboards and floor-to-ceiling windows, lets you bask in sunlight or have a box seat over the monthly Saturday Farmers' Market.

Utopia's menu gets the thumbs-up for area produce, organics, home-made baking and home-grown herbs. Mon-Fri 8.30am-4.30pm, Sat 8am-10pm, Sun 8am-4.30pm.

### Bent on Food, Wingham

A mid-19th-century town with National Trust-listed buildings and a reputation as a foodie destination. At its heart is Bent on Food, a cafe and larder where specialty food, local goodies and kitchenware grace the shelves. The menu mixes up Rudi's German bacon, Hastings Valley honey, smoked meats from Mentges Master Meats, Manning Valley cheeses and Ricardoe's area tomatoes. Mon 8am-5pm, Tue-Sat 8-11.30am, Sun 8am-3pm.

Aromas on Mayne, Murrurundi Located next to the visitors' centre, this cafe is loved by travellers for its straightforward food that bears no resemblance to the usual greasy joes along the highway. It has a great chai latte again, unusual once you get too far out of the city. Mon-Sat 8.30am-3pm, Sun 8.30am-2.30pm.

Bells at Killcare, Killcare Heights Declaration: Steve Manfredi, who runs the kitchen at this country coastal hotel, is a longtime colleague and contributor to the Sydney Morning Herald. Having said this, we had one of the finest meals you could hope for on the road here. Regional produce and Italian culinary techniques are a great match for the bushy landscape and gardens that surround the beautiful old house and discretely placed private cabins. Mon-Thu 6.30-10pm, Fri-Sun 12-3.30pm, 6.30-10pm.

## SOUTH

### Meridian Cafe, Marulan

In this quaint historical village, Meridian boasts it is the only cafe on the 150-degree meridian, the basis for Eastern Standard Time. The cafe also does its area producers proud, featuring wines, olives, oils, jams, eggs, herbs and biodynamically grown salad from the Southern Highlands. Thu-Sun 9am-4pm, Fri-Sat 6pm-late.

### Fireworks Cafe, Austinmer

Opposite the lovely Austinmer Beach, you can pull in for a summer scoop of home-made gelato at the Austi Beach Cafe. But the real character of this area is a grand street edged with leafy trees, picket fences and lovingly maintained miners' cottages. Here, residents flock to the Fireworks Cafe, with its area-sourced ingredients and casual, home-style food. Thu-Fri 10am-4pm, 7-9.30pm; Sat 9.30am-4pm, 7-9.30pm; Sun 9.30am-4pm.

### Sturt Cafe Frensham, Mittagong

The historic girls' school has charming, dappled grounds and houses a sunlit cottage that offers light meals, an open fire and an outdoor terrace. Wander across the path to the gallery with sculpture, textiles, paintings, jewellery, furniture and ceramics created by students and established Australian artists. Wed-Fri 10am-3pm, Sat-Sun 10am-4pm.

### Valley Edge, Cobargo

On the edge of the Bega Valley, this cute cream and blue weatherboard caught the eye of Angie Schiavone, the regional editor of The Sydney Morning Herald's Good Food Guide. For those who bemoan the distance between the city and a good coffee, this catering and cafe outfit roasts its own beans in-house and does panini and cakes. Mon and Wed-Sat 9am-4.30pm, Sun 10am-3.30pm.

### The River Moruya, Moruya

Set in a sustainably designed space at river's edge, this charming restaurant is a perfect pit stop. A seasonal menu features produce from area growers, cooked by talented chefs in a modern, stylised boat shed that looks north to the mountains of a national park. Tuross oysters and sheep's milk pannacotta can't be beaten. Wed-Sun 12-3pm, Wed-Sat 6-10pm.

## WEST

### Vulcans, Blackheath

Philip Searle is a legend of Australian cuisine. No drive through the Blue Mountains is complete without stopping at his rust-coloured restaurant, where you can sample sensational cuisine from the lovingly tended wood-fired oven or favourites like sweet duck neck sausages and black-vinegar glaze or the parfait, meringue and honeycomb bomb. Fri-Sun 12-3pm, 6-9.30pm.

### Union Bank Wine Bar, Orange

Stumbling out of the car with a thirst and an appetite, it's a joy to come into this sleek tavern with its long wine bar and timber tables. Feast on pork rillettes, white-bean cassoulet or Indian spiced kingfish, then linger over area wines carefully selected and served. Seven days 12-2.30pm, Mon-Sat 6-9pm.

### Paragon Cafe, Goulburn

Preserved in an aspic sheen, this art deco cafe epitomised glamorous eating on the road in those long-past decades when people still wore driving gloves and car coats and stopped off to shake off the dust from the highway. Now you come here to revel in the atmosphere, the time-warp food and the fact that it's even licensed. Mon-Fri 7.30am-9.30pm, Sat-Sun 7.30am-10pm.

### Neila, Cowra

A chef's hat, a chef with a Chinese heritage and a town that is famous for a prison breakout. You couldn't possibly write a better scenario for the ultimate in roadside dining. You can feast on stir-fried mud crabs, suckling pig, coffee caramel pork hock and sichuan pepper-cured venison. This joint is as idiosyncratic as the landscape. Thurs-Sat 6.30-11pm.

Long Track Pantry Cafe, Jugiong This modern, country cafe between Yass and Gundagai is a wonderful watering hole, from its location opposite the swimming pool to its in-house roasted coffee and home-made cakes. You can also pick up gourmet jam, preserves, dressings and home-made meals. Gives new meaning to the old tuckerbox. Wed-Mon 10am-4pm.

### Popular pie pit stops

#### Fredo Pies, Frederickton

On the Pacific Highway, just north of Kempsey, the "home of the famous crocodile pies" has a huge variety, from the Truckies Special to lemon meringue.

#### Heatherbrae Pies, Heatherbrae

A bright, clean restaurant with simple, reliable pies with names like Bushman's and Jillaroo.

#### Pie In The Sky, Cowan

Great views over the Hawkesbury bring in the bikies and the families. Pies include burgundy beef and fruit mince, with afternoon teas also offered.

#### East Lynne Store, East Lynne

It's 20 minutes north of Batemans Bay on the highway, just before the Pebbly Beach turn-off, and has devotees for its meat and apple pies.

#### Robertson Pie Shop, Robertson

Perched atop the Macquarie Pass, this classic roadhouse turned bakery is a natural stop-off point and has queues for its cherry pies and steak pies.

#### The Rainbow Pie Shop, Milton

A historic sandstone building, once the Commercial Hotel, is decorated in coloured flags and houses a bakery and popular pie range.

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/07/17/1247337225247.html>*