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Cream of the crop ... the Local Harvest sells superb apple pies. Photo: Marina Neil

SHARE In search of the perfect apple pie, Marian McGuinness finds the farmers' market, orchards and cafes of Bilpin are a pip above the rest.

WITH my city batteries running flat, the idea of a day in the country sounded the perfect recharger. The mention of dappled sunlight and the brisk tingle of mountain air did not entice my husband into the car. Then I deliver the clincher. Warm, home-made apple pie. It's a done deal. We point the car towards Bilpin

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and head beyond the bounds of the Hawkesbury River, high enough above sea level to make our ears pop.

After leaving the last set of traffic lights behind in the suburbia of Richmond, we begin our ascent of Bellbird Hill. The wide Cumberland Plain spans to the horizon over my right shoulder as we wind through bushland, along the Bells Line of Road and into Bilpin, the Land of the Mountain Apple.

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[Bilpin travel guide](#)

Bilpin was originally named Bell's Pin (pinnacle). In 1823, a decade after Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth made their more southerly crossing, 19-year-old Archibald Bell, using the knowledge of local Aborigines, found the alternative route over the Blue Mountains. Bell's diary details the richness of the soil in the Bilpin area, which led to the arrival of settlers eager to grow fruit trees for the colony. The convict-built road soon became the passage for streams of foot-plodders seeking their fortunes at the Bathurst gold fields.



Local produce at the markets.

The area's fertile soils and cool climate also nurtured the imagination of the young Hesba Brinsmead, whose bounty of children's novels from the 1960s to the 1990s transported many young readers into country adventures.

But our country adventures are just beginning. We're now in Bilpin's orchard country, with the silver tink-tink of bellbirds in our ears and cows, horses and alpacas in the fields. The rolling paddocks of fruit trees are netted to deter the evening blitz of flying foxes.

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It's almost noon and the farmers' market is soon to close. We're on the hunt for apple pie. Inside the community hall a long table is

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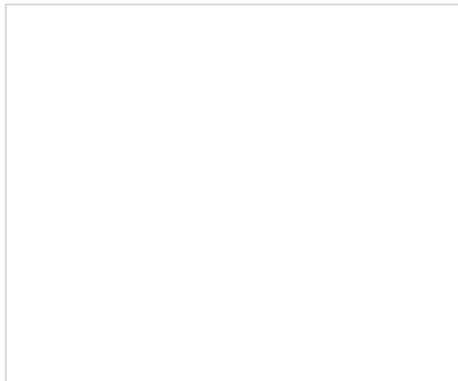
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abuzz with locals relishing their end-of-market cuppa. I'm soon in a conversation with one who has almost sold out his harvest. I buy some chokos and a butternut pumpkin that later becomes the sweetest pumpkin soup I've made.

Then comes the crunch. My farmer points to a bag of what I thought were ginger stubs but turn out to be Jerusalem artichokes. I'm given a blow-by-blow description of their growing habits, cooking styles and the etiquette of eating, all demonstrated by the earthy hands of the seller. I've had a marvellous \$2.50 worth of conversation thrown in with my plastic sack of artichokes. I'm certainly richer for my encounter.

A young girl further along ushers me to her bags of artichokes. Already laden with more than I can imagine uses for, I instead buy a slab of her home-made quince paste. Wrapped in waxed paper and tied with string, it is twice the size and half the price of a commercial pot of paste.

But we are in search of the perfect apple pie. We zigzag the roadside cafes, some with kiddies' playgrounds and other tourist attractions, and stop at a corrugated-iron shed called The Local Harvest. With its array of in-season apples, juices and jams, I'm soon having a chat with the owner, Louise, who is rugged up against the winter chill.



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The golden apple pies sitting on the green gingham shelves in her glass cabinet are irresistible. The search is over. We've found the Grail. And when she tells us that she starts her day at 5am baking three-dozen pies, we know we've struck apple gold. We snap up three of her remaining few.

In need of a coffee and apple pie fix, we stop at Tutti Fruitti, a picture-book weatherboard cottage, confettied with autumn leaves and fenced with pickets and blowsy roses. Sitting outside we watch the world go by and are served fabulous coffee and not a slice of apple pie but a whole one, with lashings of ice-cream and a jug of fresh cream.

As the mid-afternoon sun starts to lose its warmth, we make our way back to Kurrajong village, detouring on to the Old Bells Line of Road.

Again, as we wend along the dappled road of bowing trees, the bellbirds begin their afternoon sonata. The smell of wood smoke from fireplaces fills the air.

The name Kurrajong comes from the Aboriginal word for a tree that grew in the hills; the seeds when roasted were used as a substitute



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for coffee in the early settlement. In Governor Macquarie's diary of 1810, he wrote that he rode to the summit of Kurry Jung Hill. A bit further along in history, in the 1820s and 30s, Jack Donahoe and his bushranger gang roamed the area, robbing and stripping travellers before stealing their horses. But we're not worried about that today. Kurrajong is the perfect browser's village for its timber cottages housing antiques, collectables and the works of local artisans.

Before heading home, we take one last opportunity to top up our city batteries with country air as sweet and crisp as the Red Delicious apples we've bought. We stop for a bite to eat at Wrapt and sit on the back verandah overlooking the Grose Valley and Grose Wold. And Louise's apple pie? The perfect combination of sweet, crisp pastry and apple tartness. A pip above the rest.

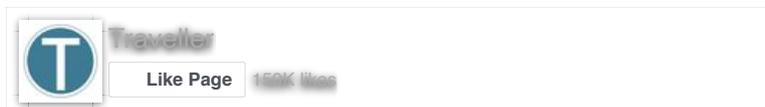
Trip notes

Getting there Bilpin is about a 90-minute drive west of Sydney's central business district. Head through Richmond and up the Bells Line of Road.

Markets there The Bilpin Markets are on every Saturday from 10am to noon in the Community Hall on Bells Line of Road. The Local Harvest opens from 10am to sunset, Friday to Monday, corner of Bells Line of Road and Johnsons Road. Tutti Fruitti, at 1917 Bells Line of Road, is open from 10am-4pm Thursday, Friday, Monday and 9.30-4.30am Saturday and Sunday (winter hours).

More information visitnsw.com.

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