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THE MODEST ISLAND

By DAVID BREWTON

THE trouble with Tasmanians is that they're just too modest, and they are building a casino to prove it.

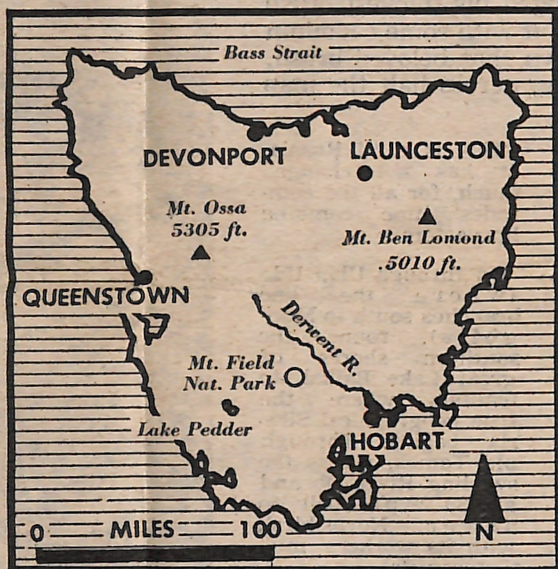
Already it is pushing its way through Hobart's skyline, a monument to mammon that, it is hoped, will be a magnet for tourists.

Do they really need it?

Anyone who has visited this lush, lovely island would doubt it. Convincing a Tasmanian is another matter.

Why, they ask, should anyone from the mainland (the rest of Australia has always been The Mainland) want to see Tasmania simply for what it is? So the State is tagged the Apple Isle . . . and they build that casino.

Our fairest state is made for seeing and savouring . . . a broad



canvas of green beauty, too green and too soft to be Australian (many non-Australian visitors to Tasmania cannot believe that it was once part of the mainland).

Incredibly, only 180,000 people (business men included) visited the island last year, though this figure represents continued growth in its tourist trade.

Most of them toured the island by car, and this seems to be the area in which the future of the local industry lies. A few facts about a Tasmanian motoring holiday:

The State is 180 miles wide by 190 miles long. It breaks up into five broad areas: the south, the central lakes, the east coast, the north-west and the west coast. All its main towns are linked by sealed highways, and are within a few hours' drive of each other.

It costs from \$58 to \$102 to take a sedan car (depending on its length) across Bass Strait on one of the ferry ships.

The essence of Tasmania's charm is that it is not quite Australian.

The English settlers had it easy there, with the lush countryside and mild climate. As a result, the State offers a glimpse of what the rest of Australia might have been, the kind of place that our pioneers would have made of it had the land given them half a chance.

You see it in the Hawthorn hedge flanking a country lane; the dignified little Georgian farm cottage with its poplar-lined drive and its rose garden; the patchwork farms of the north-west, so closely resembling their English counterparts.

The Tasmanians have a record of conservation for their historic relics, as well as natural beauty spots which have been preserved for posterity. If officialdom needed a reminder of this it got it with the recent fierce, though hopeless, protest over the proposal to flood Lake Pedder.

No less than 44 of the state's most scenic areas have been declared national parks, including much of the central lakes area.

The late Robin Boyd wrote that Tasmania's settler homes were the most interesting and best-kept in Australia.

Scattered throughout the island are stately Georgian homes, cottages and a wide range or public buildings, reminders of the state's early-nineteenth century history.

Some of the best of the Georgian houses are on public display near Launceston in the north. Further south, many members of the pastoral establishment live in handsome old homes that have been handed on through generations.

(There is a wealth of legend about these families' way of life, feeding inevitably on their lack of social contact with other groups. One popular story, still heard, is that some of them still dress formally for dinner each night . . .)

Tasmania is not noted for the possibilities it offers for surfing and skiing, though it has

fine beaches, particularly on the east coast, and skiing is booming.

It has two main snowfields: Mount Field, which is 60 miles from Hobart, and Mt Ben Lomond, 38 miles from Launceston (the main northern city).

In one respect at least these fields have an advantage over fields in N.S.W. and Victoria. They are within a short drive of the city.

The east coast, which gets the lion's share of Tasmania's sunshine ration, has spectacular beaches which are a mecca for surfing enthusiasts from all parts of the state.

The present economy class return air fare to Hobart from Perth is \$224.90. The R.A.C. in Tasmania has prepared a full range of motoring tours to suit any length of tour, from nine days to 19.