



Photos: Leila Morrissey.



welcome to twin peaks

A ROADTRIP TO THE REAL-LIFE BACKDROP OF DAVID LYNCH'S CULT CLASSIC.

WORDS TOM HAWKING

"Now, are you two getting married?" asks the Kiana Lodge's grizzled caretaker in his slow Northwestern drawl. "Or are you *Twin Peaks* fans?"

The Kiana Lodge is a pretty little timber building on a secluded road in America's Kitsap Peninsula, an unfeasibly beautiful part of Washington State about an hour from Seattle that's all pebble beaches, pine-covered islets and a postcard backdrop of snow-capped mountains. The peninsula sticks like an arrowhead into the side of Puget Sound, over 4000 kilometres of interconnected saltwater estuaries that separate this part of the USA from Canada.

It's also the place where much of the pilot was shot for David Lynch and Mark Frost's enduringly awesome TV series *Twin Peaks*. Specifically, the lodge was used for many of the original interior shots and, as its caretaker has surmised, we have driven up from the city for the day for this very reason. In fact, we're here as part of the ultimate Lynchian road trip – a journey into the heart of *Twin Peaks*.

The friendly lady who greets us at the office upstairs tells us she gets "about a hundred" *Twin Peaks* fans a year, including one who did full-blown re-enactments that extended to wrapping his girlfriend in plastic and photographing her on the beach outside – the very same pebbled stretch where Laura Palmer's body was found in that first episode. Even the log under which her body lay is still there, sitting like an immutable monolith on the empty beach.

In 2011, the lodge is open only for weddings and conferences, and as neither wedding nor conference is happening the day we visit, the place is dead silent except for the occasional crow call across the water. There's a slightly eerie vibe; we occasionally get the feeling we're being watched, although this may be attributable to an overactive imagination and/or just the fact that we're being shadowed by a black-and-white cat, who seems to be in charge here and who later attempts to help himself to our lunch. Or, just maybe, it was this atmosphere that led the *Twin Peaks* crew here in the first place.

It's been two decades since the late Jack Nance first broke the news that Laura's body had washed up on the beach: "She's dead... wrapped in plastic!" In the years since, much has been written about the influence *Twin Peaks* had on the evolution of American TV. The show was a hugely unlikely success – there are many narrative threads running through its scripts, but if it can be said to be 'about' any one thing, it's the evil and savagery we conceal beneath our veneer of civilisation, which doesn't exactly tick the boxes TV execs look for in a potential hit series.

This theme is one to which Lynch has returned many times over the course of his career – if you want to be reductive about it, you can distil pretty much all of his work to *Blue Velvet's* image of a decomposing ear in a suburban field – but *Twin Peaks* took his surrealist explorations of America's underlying darkness to a mainstream audience and, for a while at least, it succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. It became a phenomenon. And it proved that a show that started out as a sinister murder-mystery and evolved into a full-blown descent into supernatural freakiness could be

commercially successful. This kooky land of gothic Americana paved the way for similarly paranormal shows like *The X-Files*, *Carnivale* and *Lost*, while the creators of series as diverse as *The Sopranos* and *Buffy* have cited it as an influence.

Twenty years later, *Twin Peaks* still matters, and not just because of its televisual influence. It still retains a cult following in 2011 for one simple reason: it still has something to say. The show's central narrative arc remains compelling – the story of Laura Palmer, the homecoming queen with a safety deposit box full of secrets, the abused child living a nightmare that no one else understands, the one who apparently has everything to live for but wants to die, the golden girl who's "radiant on the surface but dying inside", as Lynch later described her. As well as being a bleak and moving portrayal of familial abuse, the series created a killer metaphor: *Twin Peaks* the town, idyllic on the outside but full of roiling darkness beneath, remains a powerful allegory for American society in general (and, for that matter, Australian society).

As anyone who's watched the show will know, its setting in the alpine surrounds of Washington State created a large part of its atmosphere, so it's both reassuring and mildly disconcerting to find that the portrayal of the area doesn't appear to have been overly exaggerated. The characters in the series mirrored its landscape – rugged and charming, but full of secrets and hidden dark places – and driving through the region, the sense that you're in *Twin Peaks* country is palpable. There's a definite air of wildness about the place – especially once you get up into the forest, where things can get pretty spooky pretty quickly.

The day after our trip to Kiana Lodge, we drive out to Snoqualmie, an alpine hamlet of about 10,000 people an hour inland from Seattle that's the other key stop on the *Twin Peaks* trail. At one point en route, when we stop the car to stretch our legs, we find an overgrown path into the forest and decide to explore. The trail leads down an embankment to a strange abandoned campsite, where we find a) a threadbare American flag hanging from a tree, b) a

weathered DVD copy of *Secretary* and c) the decaying skeleton of some weird animal that appears to have about eight legs. We beat a hasty retreat back to the car.

Snoqualmie itself, though, is a pleasant enough town, and the Snoqualmie Falls – which feature in the show's credit sequence – are a gobsmacking spectacle of natural beauty. As with the area around Kiana Lodge, the countryside here is amazingly pretty – there are more shades of green in the forest than seem imaginable to Australian eyes, eyes used to the stark antipodean palette of eucalypts and sun-bleached land.

The locals are generally friendly and interested in what's brought us up here, particularly those who've cottoned on to the idea of using their presence in the show as a business opportunity. Twede's Diner, for instance – immortalised in the show as the RR Diner – is a short drive from Snoqualmie, and now sells hand-drawn *Twin Peaks* maps. It also has a bunch of memorabilia pegged up on a corkboard, while the waitress who brings us a lunch that'd feed a small city-state – eggs, bacon, muffins and hash browns the size of modest topographical features – wears a T-shirt proclaiming that this is the home of "*Twin Peaks*' cherry pie and a damn fine cup of coffee". We have to confess to her that after such a colossal meal, the prospect of pie is the absolute last thing on our minds. The coffee, however, is indeed damn fine, and we start to get the feeling we could get used to spending time up here.

But as we waddle out of the diner an hour or so later, heading back toward the car and planning to drive to the old train cars where the scene of Laura's murder was filmed, something stops us in our tracks. There's a notice taped to a telephone pole, reading "HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN?" along with an identikit-style portrait of a scruffy man whose face is very familiar indeed. It's *Twin Peaks*' supernatural antagonist Bob, he of the greasy long hair and the murderous smile. For a moment – just for a moment – fact and fiction seem to blend. And suddenly, it doesn't seem so bad that we have to drive back to Seattle in an hour or so. Night will be falling soon and – as all good *Twin Peaks* fans know – the owls are not what they seem. ❁