

# Creating Today's Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area – A Brief History of its Reservation.

Our National Parks are a legacy handed down to us by Tasmanians who had the foresight to preserve what they held to be precious. They are not the Government's to give away or auction off to the highest bidder.<sup>1</sup>

Tasmania's national parks, with few exceptions, have not been volunteered by governments of the day. Instead they have resulted from the identification of values by the public and long, hard campaigns by the public to have these areas recognised as reserved areas in order to protect their scenic and conservation values.

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) is no exception.

## A Chronological Reservation History

Up until the 2013 additions, the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area comprised the Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park, Franklin–Gordon Wild Rivers National Park, Southwest National Park, Walls of Jerusalem National Park and Hartz Mountains National Park, part of the Mole Creek Karst National Park, as well as the Central Plateau Conservation Area and a number of other smaller conservation areas.

The actual reservation of these areas occurred between 1915 when the Cradle Mountain Area was established as a scenic reserve through to 1982 when the Central Plateau Conservation Area was established:

- Cradle Mountain was originally established as a scenic reserve in 1922, and extended in 1936 to include Lake St Clair and the Oakleigh Creek Conservation Area.
- The Southwest National Park was created in 1969 (following the revocation of Lake Pedder National Park for a hydro-electric dam), and was re-proclaimed and extended in 1976, with additional extensions in 1976 and 1981. This Park includes the following reserves:
  - Port Davey State Reserve established in 1951 (incorporated into the Lake Pedder National Park in 1955)
  - Lake Pedder National Park (created in 1955, later revoked).
- The Franklin-Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park was created a national park in 1981. Of its 195,200ha expanse, 14,125ha were revoked in 2 September 1982 (for hydro-electricity generation purposes). This Park includes the following reserves:
  - Gordon River State Reserve (created in 1939),
  - Lyell Highway State Reserve (created in 1939).
  - Frenchmans Cap National Park (created in 1941)
- Other pre-existing reserves that make up the TWWHA were created as follows:
  - Exit Cave State Reserve (created in 1979);
  - Southwest Conservation Area (created in 1980);
  - Walls of Jerusalem National Park (created in 1981);
  - Central Plateau Conservation Area (created in 1982).

[Source – UNESCO WH website, Jan 2015]

The last substantial modification to the World Heritage Area was the significantly larger area inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2013. This listing included new areas, many of them former forestry areas, in the Southern Forests, the Florentine Valley, the Navarre Plains and the Western Tiers.

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area was first inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982, and has been expanded on several subsequent occasions, including a major extension in 1989 and minor boundary modifications in 2010, 2012 and 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> TNPA, 2014.

## What it Took to Achieve the Reservations

Almost all these areas were only reserved after lengthy advocacy by the public. The real reservation history of these areas, that includes the story of how and why these areas were reserved, is a much longer story that spans more than a hundred year period from the late 1800s to today.

### The Early Years – 1870s to mid-1900s

The initial reservations recognised both scenic values and nature conservation, with scientific and naturalist societies such as the Royal Society of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Field Naturalists' Club, as well as individuals, being actively involved in pursuing reservation:

**Early Recognition of the Values:** Well-known photographer James Watt Beattie promoted the scenic beauty of the Central Highlands, the West Coast and Southern Forests from the late 1870s to early 1900s, advocating for the reservation of these areas. His reasons for advocating for reservation included both scenic tourism and conservation – he believed the Hartz Mountains would be an important scenic tourist attraction, but his interest in preserving the Gordon River margins was primarily the conservation of Huon pine forest and West Coast flora.<sup>2</sup>

**Cradle Mountain Reserve:** The reservation of the Cradle Mountain area was first proposed and strenuously promoted by Gustav and Kate Weindorfer (keen walkers and amateur botanists), with support from Major Ronald Smith and others (including later Fred Smithies, a Launceston businessman and bushwalker, and ET Emmett, a tourism advocate), from c.1910 when the Weindorfers came to live in Cradle Valley until 1921, the year before the area was reserved.

**Mount Field NP:** Established in 1916, Mount Field National Park was Tasmania's first 'National Park'.<sup>3</sup> Its creation was also the result of a major campaign of lobbying by a number of individuals and groups, primarily the Tourist Association, Australian Natives Association, Forest League and the Field Naturalists' Club (out of which later grew the National Park Association). While the scenic tourism value was a key reason in arguing for the reservation of the area, the creation of a large secure reserve clearly points to the protection of the natural values as being the primary motivator for reservation of the area.

This is evident in much of the documentary material relating to the campaign, for example in the first formal proposal by the park proponents in 1913 –

*"...the entire locality ... is singular in this respect, that the whole of the rich flora of the west coast is there, growing side by side with the flora of other parts. Nature almost seems to ask us that some attempt should be made to treasure and preserve this spot ...";<sup>4</sup> or the reflective 1922 comment of the Chairman of the Field Naturalists' Club (and geologist) "The Park was originally set aside in an endeavour to preserve some native fauna and a little of the romantic virgin bush from the depredation of a misguided civilisation".<sup>5</sup>*

**Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair NP:** The extension of the Cradle Mountain Reserve to include the Lake St Clair area in 1936 was also the result of lobbying by the public, largely in recognition of its scenic values, and following from the creation of Tasmania's first national parks in 1916 (Mt Field NP and Freycinet NP).

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<sup>2</sup> Conservation of the Huon Pine on the West coast had been a major concern with largely uncontrolled cutting for the Tasmanian shipbuilding industry, at the time of major economic benefit to the colony. In the 1860s, out of a serious concern for the survival of the Huon pine, George Perrin, the then Conservator of Forests, had succeeded in getting a 20 year ban placed on Huon pine logging.

<sup>3</sup> Although Freycinet National Park was established at approximately the same time, Mount Field National Park is regarded as the first national park.

<sup>4</sup> Taken from Mendel, 2003, p20.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from Mendel, 2003, p20.

**Frenchmans Cap NP:** The reservation of the Frenchmans Cap area in 1941 resulted from bushwalker advocacy in 1940, primarily to prevent the landscape damage caused by deliberately lit fires by hunters, with a large area being reserved to protect the greater area's values.

### **New Reserves and Protection– the mid-1900s to today**

From the mid-1900s, conservation in Tasmania refocussed on the securing of areas for the protection of their scientific, largely natural, values, an approach that recognised the new understandings of nature and ecological process. It was also a time for defending existing reserves against revocation.

Although from its creation in 1970 to the early 1980s the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service's (PWS) acted as a strong advocate for expansion of the national park estate, and negotiated successfully to achieve significant expansion of the State's national park system, most new conservation land continued to be the result of public advocacy and in some cases significant campaigning:

**Lake Pedder National Park:** Lake Pedder National Park (LPNP) was declared in 1955 following modifications to the originally proposed boundaries specifically to accommodate the plans of the HEC to flood the lower Serpentine Valley, but studies completed in 1972 raised the additional prospect of diverting water from the upper Huon into the Serpentine reservoir. This was ultimately accomplished by inundating the entire Serpentine and Upper Huon valley floors, in spite of significant protests against such an action.

The proposal to destroy Lake Pedder started to emerge from 1966 onwards, leading to the formation of the Save Lake Pedder National Park Committee (SLPNPC) in March 1967, based mainly in northern Tasmania. Although some resilient members of the SLPNPC persevered in their campaign against the damming, the public profile of the campaign declined once the legislation was passed, largely as a consequence of limited coverage by the media. In March 1972 the Lake Pedder Action Committee (LPAC) was formed in Hobart and within months active branches had been formed in most Australian states. Legal moves by the LPAC to challenge the validity of flooding LPNP in July 1972 required the fiat of the state attorney, but this was refused and validating legislation was passed by the parliament.

It was the campaign to save Lake Pedder that also gave rise to the United Tasmania Group (UTG) in March 1974, the first greens political party, not only in Australia, but globally.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding both extensive public outcry and a subsequent federal government inquiry and offer of a blank cheque to the Tasmanian government to implement a moratorium on the flooding and develop an alternative scheme layout that would leave Lake Pedder intact, the Tasmanian government persisted and Lake Pedder was flooded.<sup>7</sup> The Lake Pedder conflict revealed a government which was aligned to the interests of industry to the exclusion of conservation interests.<sup>8</sup>

**Southwest National Park:** Arising out of a public proposal for a much larger national park in southwest Tasmania, the South West Committee, representative of various walking and other community bodies, was established in 1963 to consider an alternative national park. In 1966 this committee recommended the formation of a South West National Park (SWNP), which included Lake Pedder National Park, but allowed for hydro-electricity generation on the Gordon River. This recommendation was subsequently supported by a government Inter-Departmental Committee - although their recommendation halved the area recommended for a South-West National Park (excluding the Davey River catchment area [because of HEC interests], New River Lagoon [mining

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<sup>6</sup> The UTG has also been considered the initial phase of the Tasmanian Greens party.

<sup>7</sup> That the federal government lacked the legal power to directly intervene on behalf of Australians outside Tasmania contributed to its decision to join the World Heritage Convention which it believed would allow such interventions in future based on the powers it would accrue under the Australian constitution by virtue of its external powers as signatory to a foreign treaty.

<sup>8</sup> In defending the HEC's interests the government concealed from the electorate information which should have been publicly available and circumvented the Upper House's review function.

interests] and east of New River Lagoon [forestry interests]).<sup>9</sup> Subsequently the recommendation of the Inter-Departmental Committee was endorsed by a Legislative Council select committee, except that the select committee endorsed flooding of the original Lake Pedder National Park.<sup>10</sup>

**Precipitous Bluff:** In 1972 a proposal to quarry limestone from Precipitous Bluff on the south coast threatened the wilderness values of the area. Because of strong public objections, this proposal led to a protracted legal battle and subsequent protection of the area, albeit in dubious exchange for revocation of part of Hartz Mountains NP to allow logging by the timber industry.

**Denison River Huon Pine Reserve:** It was Lake Pedder campaigner and photographer Olegas Truchanas who engaged in a solo campaign to save a Huon pine forest on the Denison River in the late 1960s. Through lobbying the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, Truchanas succeeded in gaining the support of parliamentarian Louis Shoobridge (a member of the Legislative Council and of the Trust).<sup>11</sup> The Forestry Commission, not wanting to interrupt pinning on the Denison River, recommended an alternative site, but provided no assessment or assistance to assess it for a reserve. Aerial photography reconnaissance undertaken at Truchanas' insistence (part funded by the HEC, the Scenery Preservation Board and the Australian Conservation Foundation) showed that the alternative site had almost no Huon pines. It required Truchanas to take yet another expedition to locate the Huon pine forest on the Denison River, which was ultimately reserved in 1970 (and in 1990 re-named the Truchanas Huon Pine Forest).

**A Western Tasmanian Wilderness Reserve and World Heritage:** Community recognition of the need to take a more holistic approach to advocacy for the Tasmanian wilderness led to the formation of the South West Tasmanian Action Committee (SWTAC) in 1974. By 1976 this had become a fully national body with branches in all states. The key focus of the SWTAC (and later the Tasmanian Wilderness Society which was formed by amalgamation of the SWTAC with a number of smaller conservation groups) was the expansion of national parks in southwest Tasmania and their linking to Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair National Park to protect not only a range of natural values, but also the wilderness value of the region.

World Heritage recognition for southwest Tasmania was also a conservation goal, and Tasmanian conservationists were assisted in this by the Australian Conservation Foundation. The foundation for such a move was laid in 1976 when the Federal government pledged to assist the Tasmanian government establish a National Park of World significance which would include a substantial wilderness area.

**Franklin-Lower Gordon Wild Rivers NP:** The first formal proposal to include the Franklin River area in the protected area (and link the SWNP in the south with the Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair National Park in the north) was adopted by the state conference of the United Tasmania Group (UTG) in March 1974, and from 1976 the new Tasmanian Wilderness Society found an increasing proportion of its time taken up with defending the wild rivers.

By 1978 however concerns regarding proposals by the HEC to flood the valleys of the Gordon and Franklin rivers were becoming acute, and the area had still not been reserved. In July 1980 the Lowe state government established the Franklin – Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park, and at the same time, in response to continued public pressure, proposed to the federal government that it be nominated for World Heritage listing, jointly with the South West and Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Parks.

But pressure for hydro-electric development that would drown key parts of the area persisted. The issue was so intractable that a state referendum was held in the early 1980s to determine what approach to take. The referendum attracted public outrage when it did not include the option of

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<sup>9</sup> The South-West Committee responded to the Inter-Departmental Committee's Report by publicly criticising the absence of impartial examination of important factors involved in the proposal and called for an inquiry.

<sup>10</sup> The Legislative Council put the legislation aside pending the select committee's report but that committee had not been in a position to meaningfully address alternative schemes that might have saved the lake because alternatives were not disclosed by the HEC in time.

<sup>11</sup> Also a grandson of Louis Manton Shoobridge who initiated the Russell Falls Reserve.

voting for no dams at all.<sup>12</sup> Dam construction was consequently approved on the Gordon River below the Franklin River.

This led to a major Tasmanian (Tasmanian Wilderness Society) led public national and international campaign to prevent the Franklin River from being flooded. This included the Tasmanian Wilderness Society organised non-violent blockade of the construction site that saw a total of 2,613 people registered as blockaders. Other conservation organisations, notably the Australian Conservation Foundation, also threw their weight behind the Franklin campaign. Public concern was so high that there were massive street protests in Tasmania and, when the HEC commenced site works for its power development, over 1,000 protesters were arrested for trespass during a blockade of the work sites.

Community support for no dams also came from a substantial proportion of the wider Australian community. The New South Wales branch of the South-West Action Committee refocused as a branch of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society fighting for the Franklin River. A Melbourne branch was established in 1979 and by 1983 there were about 30 branches throughout Australia. In 1981 a massive federal election campaign saw 4,000 people march in torrential rain in Sydney to demand Federal intervention and 15,000 people attend a 'no dams' rally in Melbourne. This ultimately led to the election of a new government that had publicly committed itself to halting the dams. Visible public support continued in various elections outside Tasmania, with for example 41% of voters in a Canberra by-election in May 1982 writing "no dams" across their ballot papers, as did 40% of voters in a Victorian by-election in December 1982.

**Southern Forests and Forth - Lemonthyme Valleys:** Major incursions into the wilderness by logging interests, and the likelihood of their considerable expansion, continued to attract the concern of conservationists from the 1980s onwards. This came to a head with controversy over logging in the Southern Forests and Forth Valley - Lemonthyme area and, following a failure of Tasmanian government process, the Federal government set up a Royal Commission-type investigation, known as the "Helsham Inquiry", in 1987-1988 to investigate the competing conservation and forestry claims for the key areas in contention. In its final report the legal and economic members of the Commission adopted a highly reductionist approach that minimised recognition of World Heritage values and ecological inter-relationships, but the one member with ecological expertise produced a minority report that confirmed the heritage significance of much of the area under investigation

**Greens Labor Accord Additions to the TWWHA:** Further conservationist campaigning at the 1987 election, and then the success of the Greens in the 1989 state elections which indicated the strong public support for conservation in Tasmania, and the subsequent Greens Labor Accord, provided for further areas to be added to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (including parts of the Central Plateau and Western Tasmania).

**Recent Additions to the TWWHA:** The last substantial modification to the World Heritage Area in 2013 included new areas, many of them former forestry areas, in the Southern Forests, the Florentine Valley, the Navarre Plains and the Western Tiers. Many of these recently added areas were areas recommended for listing in 1982 and 1989, and much of the area added in 2013 comprised areas proposed for listing in the major action by Tasmanian environmentalists in 2008-09 in conjunction with the 2009 World Heritage Mission to the TWWHA, and which were re-identified as areas for listing through the environmental movement led c.2010-2013 Tasmanian Forest Agreement process (that sought to ensure greater conservation within State Forest areas by working in partnership with the forest industry).

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<sup>12</sup>As a consequence of which many thousands of Tasmanians simply wrote "no dams" on the ballot paper, resulting in an informal vote tally of 44%.

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UNESCO World Heritage website, Jan 2015.

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