TNPA NEWS

TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION INC

Newsletter No 8 Autumn 2007

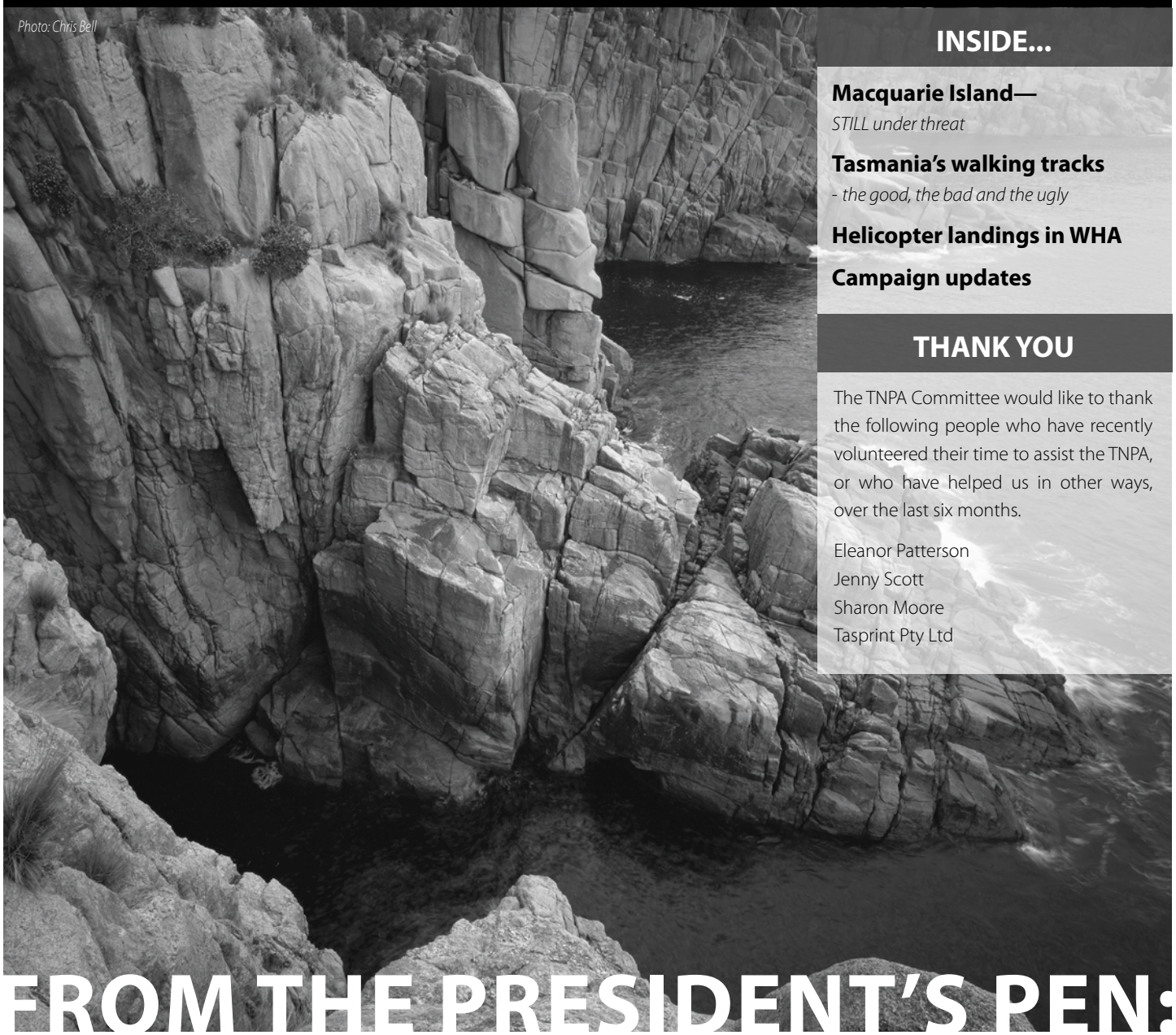

Photo: Chris Bell

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THANK YOU

The TNPA Committee would like to thank the following people who have recently volunteered their time to assist the TNPA, or who have helped us in other ways, over the last six months.

Eleanor Patterson
Jenny Scott
Sharon Moore
Tasprint Pty Ltd

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PEN:

I am writing this from Wheel Bay on Tasmania's West Coast. Brief showers pass overhead, alternately changing the sky from blue to grey. A juvenile white-breasted sea eagle in mottled plumage floats across the blustery sky like a huge butterfly. Few people visit this wondrous, rugged coast, yet its national park potential is outstanding. Several years ago this whole area was part of a state forest till finally being conceded as a conservation area under the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA).

Three hundred metres above this granite-hewn coast lies the elevated plateau that one day may carry a wind farm. If this were England or France it would be called a wilderness, and, for all intents and purposes it is mostly that. A four-wheel-drive track (or more precisely, a scar not a track) runs along this shelf to Granville Harbour and old mineral exploration tracks branch off at intervals, braiding into the unsightly scars so associated with four-wheel-drive vehicles, yet the *feel* of this place is one of wildness—that rare and vanishing quality that is fast disappearing from our Earth.

I start this report with this brief ramble to illustrate the fact that there still are wild places in Tasmania that need special care and management. And this, of course, is where TNPA will always endeavour to play a role. Whilst anyone

To identify, protect, conserve, present, and where appropriate, rehabilitate the area and to transmit that heritage to future generations in as good or better condition than at present.

Overall objectives of the World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999

concerned about the environment acknowledges the role wind farms will play in a sustainable future, there are some places that should *never* have wind farms: this place is one of them. Two things are at issue here: firstly, this wild coast of Tasmania has very high conservation and cultural value (its spectacular scenery and its place in Tasmania's history, being the coast first sighted by Abel Tasman as he sailed past in 1642, noting as he did so the mountains later named Mt Zeehan and Heemskirk [which rise behind me]), and secondly, the area is a crucial flight path for migratory birds (the orange-bellied parrot in particular). Whilst I was wandering across the top of the plateau, a small flock of spine-tailed swifts flashed past causing me to think that the plateau's very location may serve as an important upwelling of air that may assist the birds' flight. One thing is certain: wind farms and migrating birds do not go together; already at least six wedge-tailed eagles (and countless shearwaters, bats etc) have been killed by windmills at Woolnorth, a warning of the danger—*real* not imaginary—posed by them.

As one of TNPA's briefs is to promote areas worthy of national park status to be included in the current reserve system, this stunning area warrants such a promotion.

Of more immediate concern, of course, are the threats to our current national parks—increasing and becoming bolder each time. As if tacky tourist standing camps and the like were not bad enough, a more worrying trend is the cavalier attitude of some developers concerning appropriate procedures. I speak of the illegal helicopter landings on the western side of Fury Gorge *inside* Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park and *within* the wilderness zone: an activity not permitted under the World Heritage Area Management Plan. Doubly disturbing is the fact that the Parks and Wildlife Service *knew* about the activity and chose to ignore it—something that does not augur well for the future management of our national parks, and calls into question the senior management skills of our PWS. At the time of writing, TNPA is seeking legal advice. The current situation is that the helicopter company may be allowed to land inside the adjacent Granite Tor Conservation Area—an activity still at odds with the maintenance of wilderness and World Heritage values. (In the 2004 *State of the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA Report*, Proposed Action 22 calls for: Parks and Wildlife Service, in consultation with airspace regulators and operators, to proactively manage noise to maintain the natural peace and quiet of the TWWHA, and so protect the quality of visitors' wilderness recreational experience, for example by developing tranquillity standards for identified sites and/or zones within the TWWHA.)

We should remind ourselves, of course, that these new assaults upon our parks are not restricted to Tasmania—or even to mainland Australia for that matter. The October 2006 issue of *National Geographic* devotes almost the entire magazine to world parks at risk. Entitled 'Places We Must Save' the story is a sober reminder of the continuing and accelerating threats upon national parks worldwide. Imported into almost every country in the world, national parks—often described as 'the best idea America ever had'—is a concept worthy of our total commitment and whose future is as important as freedom and life itself. The threats to world parks are a familiar story: the replacement of conservation-based management with 'political appointees' designed to facilitate the inclusion of the money-driven tourist industry at the expense of conservation, and of course, the massive under-funding of relevant parks services, whether it be in Tasmania or Bolivia. The ugly intrusion into our parks of distasteful and inappropriate tourism at the expense of 'wildness' is one of the most pressing of our concerns and one which will entail constant vigilance.

At home, we are faced with the too-cosy alliance of some individual entrepreneurs and hotel chains with a tourism-focused government making it easier for management plans to be altered and illegal acts to be ignored. The tacky safari-style cabins to cater for 'niche markets' in Freycinet National Park and the tourist resort being built at Cockle Creek (facilitated by a simple change of the management plan) are two of the current developments which TNPA opposes and which should never have been countenanced in the first place.

And, of course, there is the tragic story of Macquarie Island. That the mismanagement of this World Heritage island has been allowed to get to this sorry state beggars belief. To add insult to injury, the Minister, Paula Wriedt, seems to suggest that handing responsibility for the island to the Commonwealth will solve everything. Macquarie Island is now the most endangered World Heritage Site in the world—a sad indictment of both the state and federal governments, illustrating their total ignorance of the living world.

The assaults keep coming. That a new forest propaganda group is now canvassing the idea that we may need to log some of our national parks as the resource simply isn't there to feed a pulp mill, should send shock waves into every mind that cherishes the national park idea: let there be no mistake, this is not merely grandstanding; I suspect we are going to hear more and more of this reactionary thinking as our society becomes more and more unsustainable and we drift further away from Nature.

Whilst the assaults on parks is a world-wide phenomenon, Tasmania seems to stand out in its mediocrity of vision—a vision which in turn is presenting us with a parks system slowly being reduced to the mediocrity that Newton Drury spoke of in his famous statement of 1940 (see below). Only one thing can stop this of course, and that is the determined effort of those who believe otherwise. Whilst it is easy to become despondent over the assaults that seem to materialise every day, we must remind ourselves of the small victories achieved and take comfort in the fact that had no one stood up for the environment in the last 30 years, Tasmania would be as ruined as everywhere else in the world.

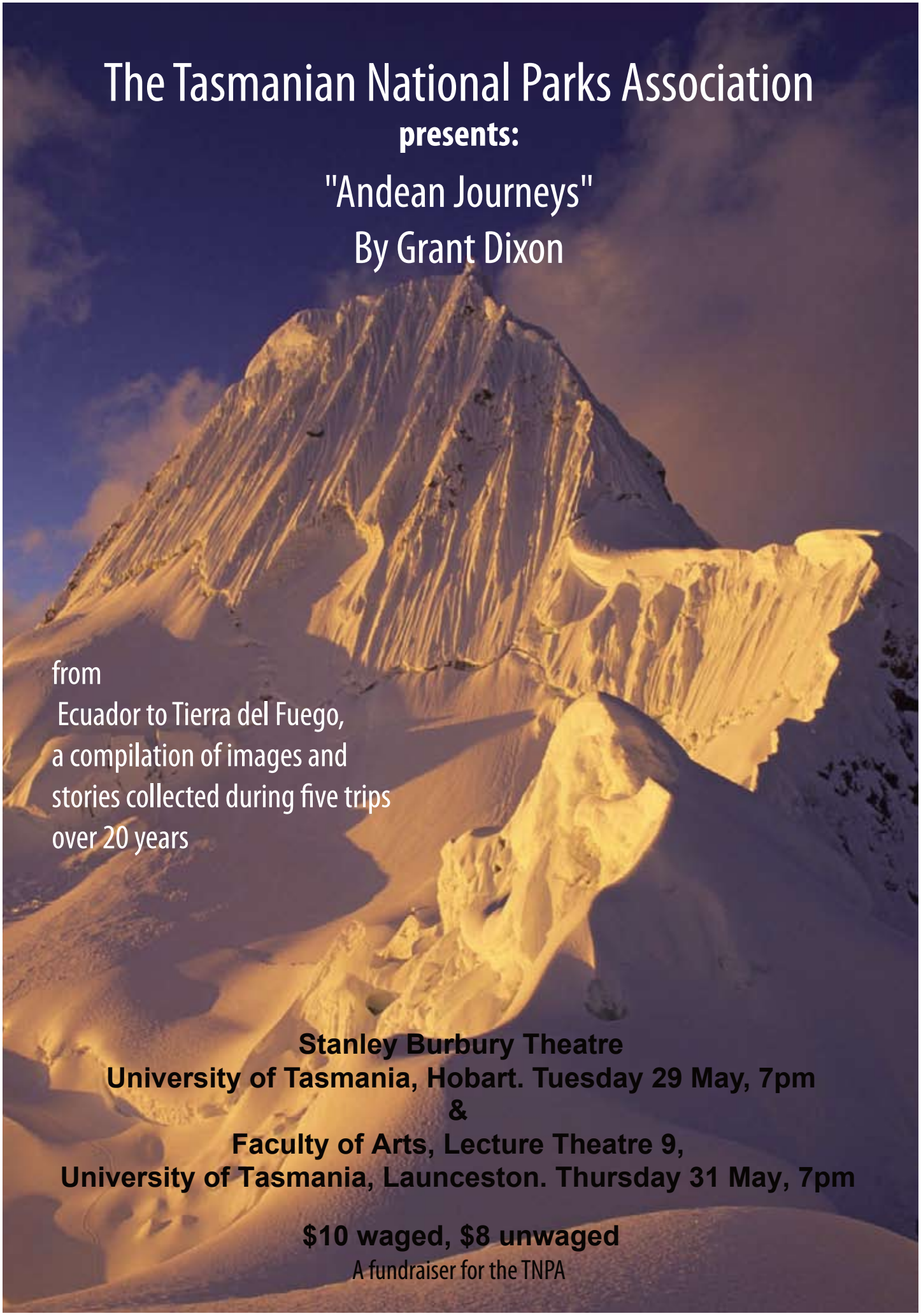
• • •

The wind has fallen away to a murmur but the surf still pounds the shoreline of Wheel Bay in thunderous explosions. Great sheets of salt spray sweep across the shore like highland mist. Overhead, another sea eagle—a mature bird this time—cruises nobly across in its unmistakable colours which speak of the sea: white and powder-grey. I ponder its future as I do any bird that may have to run the gauntlet of the swirling blades of an ill-placed wind farm. Like many of our birds, the eagle's future is by no means certain, but one thing *is* certain: with organisations like TNPA insisting on caring for our wildlands and strengthening the 'national park idea', it just may stand a chance.

Chris Bell *President, TNPA*

'If we are going to succeed in preserving the greatness of the national parks, they must be held inviolate. They represent the last stand of the primitive. If we are going to whittle away at them we should recognise, at the very beginning, that all such whittlings are cumulative and that the end result will be mediocrity. Greatness will be gone'.

Newton Drury, 1940 (From *The Living Wilderness*, journal of the Wilderness Society (USA), December 1980.)


The Tasmanian National Parks Association
presents:
"Andean Journeys"
By Grant Dixon
from
Ecuador to Tierra del Fuego,
a compilation of images and
stories collected during five trips
over 20 years
Stanley Burbury Theatre
University of Tasmania, Hobart. Tuesday 29 May, 7pm
&
Faculty of Arts, Lecture Theatre 9,
University of Tasmania, Launceston. Thursday 31 May, 7pm
$10 waged, $8 unwaged
A fundraiser for the TNPA

Macquarie Island
STILL UNDER THREAT

Claire Newman

On 26 March 2007 the Lennon government announced that they would not co-fund the *Plan to Eradicate Rabbits and Rodents from Subantarctic Macquarie Island*. The federal government has committed to fund half the total cost of implementing the plan, now estimated at $24.6 million. World Heritage values continue to erode with ongoing degradation and landslides, while the political quagmire thickens.

The TNPA believes the refusal of the state government to co-fund the plan is disgraceful and in breach of its management responsibilities. Tasmania owns the island and has a statutory obligation to responsibly manage the island under state legislation. Federal Minister for the Environment, Malcolm Turnbull has asked when the Tasmanian Government will shoulder its constitutional responsibility by supporting the plan. He has accused the state government of buck-passing, rhetoric and creating smokescreens.

The Tasmanian Government maintains that the federal government should pay the total cost. State Minister for the Environment, Paula Wriedt believes that this is an international issue beyond the day-to-day management responsibilities of the state. She believes the Lennon government cannot justify spending $12.3 million (half the total cost) of Tasmanian taxpayers' money on the eradication of rabbits and rodents on the island—the strongest recommendation within the *Macquarie Island Nature Reserve and World Heritage Area Management Plan 2006*. And yet this government has squandered $15 million on the Hawthorn Football Club and $23 million on the local racecourse!!

The Tasmanian Government has managed this situation shamefully. Despite the urgency of the issue, the project's progress has been excruciatingly slow. The *Plan to Eradicate Rabbits and Rodents from Subantarctic Macquarie Island* sat with the Tasmanian Environment Minister (Judy Jackson, and then Paula Wriedt) for approximately one year without action. Minister Wriedt announced in March that two shooters would be deployed on Macquarie Island in April as an interim measure to reduce the rabbit population. This announcement came without any consultation or advice from the Parks and Wildlife Service or Department of Primary Industries and Water staff—and was later reneged. Confidence in Minister Wriedt is eroding as quickly as the island itself.

In February TNPA representatives attended a meeting with Francesco Bandarin, Director of the World Heritage Centre and Giovanni Boccardi, head of the Asia-Pacific Unit of the World Heritage Centre to raise the issue. The *Macquarie Island Nature Reserve and World Heritage Area Management Plan 2006* was introduced to the delegation. It was noted that the plan was shelved for almost three years before it was finally brought into legal effect. The plan is now in force—a statutory document legally binding on the Tasmanian Government. The plan states that the eradication of rabbits, rats and mice is one of the highest conservation priorities due to their combined effect on biodiversity and landscape. (Yet Paula Wriedt denies that eradication is a day-to-day management responsibility!)

The World Heritage delegation was urged to support the funding and implementation of the plan to eradicate rabbits and rats from the island, and responded favourably. They noted that the problem would be raised in June at the IUCN (World Conservation Union) World Heritage Committee meeting in Christchurch, irrespective of whether the plan was endorsed and funded before then, as the damage to World Heritage values would still be continuing.

Unlike many other problems relating to reserve management, the issue can be addressed in a straightforward manner by an adequate injection of funds to implement the eradication plan. The problem will not go away, and the longer it takes to implement the plan, the more expensive it will ultimately be.

After many months withholding the document, the Tasmanian environment department has released the *Plan to Eradicate Rabbits and Rodents from Subantarctic Macquarie Island* for public viewing, see http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/draft-macquarie-rabbit-eradication-plan.html.

The plan notes that 'it is considered critical that an eradication operation is conducted as soon as possible to halt further vegetation destruction and associated soil instability, and to subsequently assist the recovery of seabird populations on Macquarie Island.' The plan also suggests that re-colonisation of the island by affected seabird species would be rapid given habitat restoration and lack of predatory rodents (2006:9). Funding to implement the plan is required urgently before the damage becomes totally irreversible.

As a non-profit NGO, committed to the preservation of Tasmania's national parks and reserved areas, the TNPA is concerned that finances for the eradication may ultimately impact on the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), and/or affect the already impoverished purse of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service. Minister Turnbull maintains that the federal contribution of $12.3 million will be 'new money', not funds already committed to the TWWHA, or money that would otherwise be available for conservation programs in the state. He has noted that funding contributions will be sourced from the national component of the Natural Heritage Trust and no existing projects in Tasmania would be impacted by the contribution to the eradication programme.

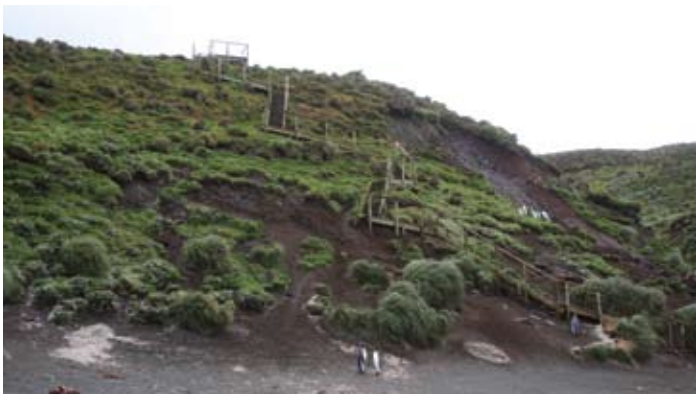
TNPA maintains it is critical that funding for the implementation of the eradication plan is provided as additional government funding, not at the expense of existing budgets required to ensure adequate management of conservation values on mainland Tasmania.

There is considerable lead time needed to address the complex logistics of the eradication plan before the on-ground work can proceed. Personnel are urgently required to start implementing the plan, and to facilitate interim on-ground strategies to prevent further damage before the actual baiting operation is carried out.

Action is required immediately before the damage becomes utterly irreversible—and World Heritage values completely destroyed. This is becoming an appalling embarrassment to Tasmania and Australia. The stalemate between the federal and the state governments continues and 'is fast becoming an ugly symbol of Australian political failure' (*The Mercury*, March 7, 2007).

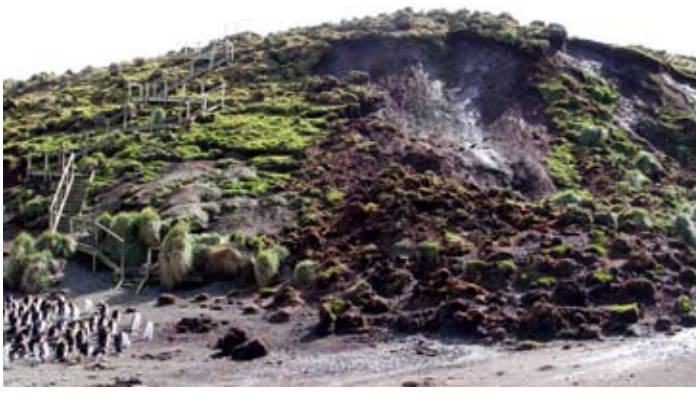
State government lethargy in taking action has been deplorable. It has now been announced that they will not co-fund the eradication program, and no counter offers have been proposed. Precious time is being lost while albatross and other threatened species inch closer to the tenuous edge of extinction. It is time to question our government's commitment and capacity to manage threats to our precious wild places. As noted in the plan, 'eradication is considered ... the only way to protect the long term integrity of indigenous fauna' (2006:13).

Sandy Bay tourist staircase 1990, healthy vegetation of tussock and Macquarie Island cabbage.



Staircase Feb 2007—increased slope erosion including large landslip behind staircase which occurred in September 2006. Staircase was closed for whole tourist season 2006-2007 due to safety reasons.

Staircase December 2005, most tussock and cabbage destroyed by rabbits, active slope erosion



The landslip next to staircase which occurred Sept 06—photo taken Oct 06, a month after it occurred.

The World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) has suggested the Tasmanian Government hand management of the island onto the federal government. They posit that the federal government's management of the island would create a greater commitment to conservation and protection. The TNPA Macquarie Island working group agrees that if the state cannot deliver management responsibilities to ensure the well-being of the island, alternatives should be considered. By not co-funding the eradication program on Macquarie Island, the Tasmanian Government has demonstrated that it does not take conservation management responsibilities seriously. The island is an international treasure and Tasmania's negligence is unacceptable.

The working group supported by TNPA members, local scientific experts and other conservation organisations continues to meet each month to discuss the latest situation regarding implementation of the eradication plan. Initiatives for the support of the plan and promotion of the issue have been coordinated through the working group and have included discussions with stakeholders, targeted correspondence, meetings with key bureaucrats, and media releases. A web page, hosted by the TNPA website has also been compiled, see http://www.tnpa.asn.au/macquarie/index.html. For more information and to become involved in the working group, please contact admin@tnpa.asn.au.

The TNPA working group also compiled a Macquarie Island submission for the Senate inquiry into the adequacy of funding for national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas. This is listed as submission 78a and can be viewed online at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita_ctte/nationalparks/submissions/sublist.html.

Background information

Macquarie Island has been World Heritage listed as an outstanding example of major stages of the earth's evolutionary history, and a place of exceptional natural beauty. The island is a critical nesting site for four species of albatross and is characterised by huge seal and penguin colonies. A number of species found on the island are listed as vulnerable to extinction including four species of albatross, five species of burrow-nesting seabirds and the southern elephant seal and subantarctic fur seal. The eradication of cats from the island, reduced effectiveness (and now unavailability) of the myxoma virus and climate change have caused an explosion in the numbers of feral rabbits, rats and mice on the island. Extensive damage to the native vegetation caused by the rabbits, and subsequent erosion is impacting the protection needed for burrow-nesting seabirds. Several important breeding sites on the island have been badly degraded. The loss of native vegetation caused by the rabbit plague has also caused severe landslips on the island, including a slide in mid-2006 which killed a number of king penguins. Rats are also preying directly on the eggs, chicks and adults of some of the seabird species.

Macquarie Island covers 13,000 hectares and has been part of Tasmania since 1825.

Membership Competition Prize Winners

The TNPA would like to congratulate the prize winners of the 2006 National Membership Competition. Held in conjunction with the Great Australian Bushwalk, the Membership Competition was open to new members who joined national park associations between the end of June and 31 October 2006. Terrific prizes were donated to each state by World Expeditions, Sea to Summit, Silva and Rockport.

First prize—Sea to Summit Deluxe Bushwalking Pack—won by Ian Matthews

Second prize—A Silva Compass and Headlamp Set—won by Will Hallinan

Third prize—Rockport Walking Boots—won by John Hunter

The national prize of a World Expeditions 8 Day Larapinta Trek was won by Ailsa Cowan in Queensland.

Lucky leader prizes were also donated to GAB walk leaders by Silva and Sea to Summit. Congratulations to Rob Hill (winner of the Sea to Summit Pilbara Hat) and Catharine Errey (winner of the Silva Ranger 15T Compass).

The TNPA would like to thank new members, the GAB walk leaders and the prize sponsors. For more information on the sponsors see their websites:

www.worldexpeditions.com | www.seatosummit.com.au | www.macson.com.au (Silva) | www.rockport.com

Ian Mathews, one of the membership competion winners, at the Mt Victoria Forest Reserve. Photo: Kym Mathews.

A new iconic walk or creating a new problem —THE THREE CAPES WALK

Anne McConnell

The PWS is currently undertaking a feasibility study into developing a 'Three Capes Walk' in the Tasman National Park on the Tasman Peninsula. Seen by the Department of Tourism, Arts and the Environment as being a new 'iconic walk' for Tasmania, in the mould of the Overland Track or the Milford and Routeburn Tracks in New Zealand, the walk is proposed to run from Pirates Bay to Cape Hauy then to Cape Pillar then to Cape Raoul, with a boat crossing of some type across Port Arthur.

On the basis of a briefing by PWS staff, the TNPA has outlined in a submission a number of concerns about both the proposal and the proposal development process. The TNPA's key concerns include:

The Concept

- We do not believe you can create 'iconic walks', but rather iconic walks are walks which become highly popular because of the nature of the walk (ie, simply designating a walk 'iconic' does not make it so).
- Tasmania is not New Zealand and we should be developing our own style of walks, not copying from elsewhere.
- The proposal appears to include the development of private huts (i.e. for company use as in the case of the Overland Track). The TNPA are strongly opposed to the development of private huts in areas of public estate, primarily because of equity issues (this type of infrastructure is elite and exclusive), but also because of the problems of ensuring these are well managed, the added burden on land managers to monitor and regulate this, and the likelihood that public funds will be spent on infrastructure designed for private use.
- It is likely that existing day and extended walks in the area, which are popular with walkers and already linked, will be upgraded, with the result that the existing nature of these quiet, self-reliant coastal walks will be changed, potentially excluding the current dominantly Tasmanian walker clientele in favour of non-Tasmanian tourists.
- The PWS is building yet another walking track when it does not have sufficient resources to manage and maintain existing tracks.
- It is likely that track fees will be introduced to what is essentially an existing no-fee track.

The route

- The extension of the walk to the western side of Port Arthur will involve considerable expense in relation to track building and has implications for the conservation of the convict context of Port Arthur, and likely weed and plant disease problems and visual impacts in the sensitive heath country that the track will traverse. It is logistically complex and would, we understand, be dependent on the provision of water transport across the Port Arthur inlet (this may be viable for organised groups but creates a difficult situation for independent walkers).
- Since the walk as presently conceived does not start at an existing significant destination this is likely to lead in the longer term to a perceived need to develop infrastructure at the trail head (ie, in a new location within or on the edge of the national park).
- The coast between Budget Head and Denmans Cove has high potential for erosion, visual impact and walker safety issues, consequently the proposed construction of a large section of new track in this area should be avoided.

The planning and evaluation framework

- There seems to be no provision for evaluating the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Three Capes Walk in the feasibility study. It is essential that an initial environmental impacts assessment be part of the feasibility study.
- The Tasman National Park is part of the public estate and the public deserves to be consulted and to have the opportunity to provide input about both the concept and any detailed plans if the proposal goes ahead, yet the process appears to have no provision for public consultation.
- The geographic scope of the feasibility study is worryingly narrow. The Tasman National Park does not exist in isolation and it is essential that how the walk will fit with the conservation, promotion and presentation of the other values of the Tasman Peninsula is seriously considered as a key part of the feasibility study. This is particularly important given the significant historic convict associations and convict heritage values of the Tasman Peninsula, and critical given the inclusion of the Port Arthur Historic Site in the Australian Government convict site serial nomination to the World Heritage List.
- The economic impact assessment also appears to be narrow. The impacts of a new major walk like this on other commercial operators in the state and the consequence of recent federal government funds for developing ecotourism in natural areas need to be built into the market research component of the feasibility study.

The TNPA is requesting that the PWS address these concerns and has indicated that it does not support the Three Capes Walk as presently proposed, but with reservations would support a Two Capes Walk that uses only the eastern part of the Tasman Peninsula. Any consideration of a western extension should only occur on the basis of a successful Two Capes Walk.

Tasmania's Walking Tracks

—THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Robert Campbell

Tasmania has one of the world's most extensive and spectacularly beautiful park systems, including some of Australia's most rugged mountain scenery, wild rivers and remote wilderness. Images of these wild places have come to help define Tasmania and attract visitors to Tasmania to experience the challenges and pleasures of walking in this unique landscape.

The walking track network within these areas (estimated at over 3,000 km in total) collectively constitutes the single largest infrastructure asset managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS). Not only does this network play a crucial role in the enjoyment experienced by the many thousands of tourists who come to Tasmania, it also has a crucial role to play in the overall presentation of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA). In 1996, over half of all visitors to the state (around 250,000 people) went walking while in Tasmania—countless Tasmanians also use the track network.

Recently I had the pleasure of completing an extended walk through Tasmania's magnificent Southwest National Park. However, my joy turned to despair, and ultimately to shame, as I had to slog my way out through the river of mud known as the South Coast Track over the South Cape Range. While the overall standard of this track varies, the extremely poor sections are characterised by deep mud, excessive width and a tangle of tree roots making the track somewhat difficult to negotiate and possibly dangerous. All conditions are made worse if water flows across the track—indeed, the track can become just a river of deep mud.

Promoted internationally, the South Coast Track is one of Tasmania's premier walking tracks. Having walked extensively throughout Australia and overseas this section of the South Coast Track ranks is the worst I have ever encountered. To invite tourists to experience such a deplorable standard is totally unacceptable.

Of course, problems with the Tasmanian walking track network are not limited to the South Coast Track. The infamous Sodden Lodden on the Frenchman's Cap walk is well known and from my recent experience the track across Moonlight Flats is in a similar deplorable state. The list, unfortunately, is long. While the opportunity to experience the challenges of the natural landscape is one of the rewards of walking, one nevertheless needs to question whether these challenges should extend to dealing with those posed by human impacts and neglect. Slogging through a muddy track for hours is certainly not pleasurable. And it is certainly not the way to present Tasmania's unique national parks and WHA to visitors.

As stated in the WHA Management Plan 1999, the overarching management objective of the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA is:

> *1. To identify, protect, conserve, present and, when appropriate, rehabilitate the world heritage and other natural and cultural values of the WHA, and to transmit that heritage to future generations in as good or better condition than at present.*

This overall management objective is further augmented by a number of other objectives which include the principles to:

> *4.2 maintain or enhance wilderness quality;*
>
> *4.3 maintain or enhance environmental quality;*
>
> *4.4 maintain or enhance landscape quality;*
>
> *4.5 protect and conserve historic heritage and Aboriginal heritage; and*
>
> *6. To assist people to appreciate and enjoy the WHA in ways that are compatible with the conservation of its natural and cultural values, and that enrich visitor experience.*

The plan also states that 'the highest level of management responsibility is to protect, conserve and present the area's world heritage values', while there is also 'an obligation of long-term care and stewardship of the WHA to

ensure that the area's natural and cultural heritage is not degraded through cumulative impacts over time.'

The present problems indicate that we are failing to meet these objectives. However, these problems are not a recent creation. In the early 1990s it was estimated that 120 km of track were already heavily eroded to a depth of 25 cm or more, while a further 150 km of track were muddy and 85 km were braided. Excessive degradation of the WHA track system was also identified in the *Tasmanian Walking Track Strategy* published in 1998, which identified as a significant management concern the long-term costs of stabilising and maintaining a track network that is actively eroding. Despite the good work undertaken by the PWS in some areas over the past decade, ongoing monitoring data indicates that a significant portion of tracks remains either in a poor condition or its deteriorating.

'Did the mud-wrestlers go this way?'
Rob Campbell on the track over the South Cape Range.
Photo: Ian Welch.

As reported in the 2003 *State of the Environment Report*, the past two decades have seen an increase in the number of walkers in the Tasmanian WHA. This increased traffic has lead to deterioration in the walking track network throughout much of the region, with the problems made worse by the fragility of the landscape. The total number (960) and length (3,100 km) of tracks is known to exceed the capacity to manage them.

While poor tracks degrade the quality of the walker recreational experience, they also damage often sensitive ecological communities and degrade the biophysical wilderness quality of the WHA—which Australia has an obligation to protect. Once damaged, recovery time can be very slow. Indeed, the 2004 *State of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area* concluded about walker impacts: 'if not effectively addressed by management, unsustainable levels and types of visitor use have the potential to cause progressive and serious degradation of the TWWHA.'

While the excellent track work which has been undertaken in some areas over the past decade by the PWS needs to be acknowledged, the continued poor and deteriorating state of many of the state's walking tracks and the reduction in funds for track maintenance in recent years (particularly in light of the large amounts given to horse racing and football clubs) should be condemned.

As a member of the Bushwalking and Track Review Panel (BATR) formed in 2002 to assist the PWS develop acceptable solutions to the problems of degradation of walking tracks, it is extremely disappointing that the funds and commitment needed to implement the strategic and integrated approach identified by this group have not been forthcoming. BATR developed a workable approach to track management based on what is known as the Limits of Acceptable Change—however, it would appear that a lack of funding and commitment from the state government has stymied its implementation.

Instead, the Lennon government has recently begun promoting a new long distance walk, to be known as the Three Capes Walk, on the Tasman Peninsula (see article pg 7). When many of our existing iconic walks are already in a deplorable state surely we need to repair these tracks before constructing and promoting new tracks (which themselves will need to be maintained).

The PWS has established a sound scientific knowledge base and expertise which can guide management towards sustainable environmental management of the track network—solutions exist, the problem appears to be a lack of funding and commitment. Indeed, annual appropriations to the PWS have remained somewhat static (and have declined in real terms) over the past three years, being around $21.2 million in 2004 and $20.8 million in 2006. The downgrading of funds was highlighted a few years back when many of Tasmania's track workers had to seek employment in Victoria.

While the TNPA calls on the state government to honour its commitments to protecting our natural heritage by reversing this funding situation, the TNPA is also concerned about an apparent shift of funding away from back-country conservation management to funding of tourist-based facilities at front-country nodes. The building of visitor centres and the present upgrade to the Wineglass Bay Lookout track are examples—the latter costing, I understand, in excess of $500,000—and when a reasonable track already existed.

Given the present neglect of the back-county and high conservation areas, the TNPA calls on the state government to provide additional and sufficient funding to repair and reverse the deteriorating state of many of Tasmania's walking tracks. This is important not only for protecting Tasmania's conservation values but also given the role that our national parks play in the state's tourism strategy.

What is 'Good' is that we have an extensive track network by which we can enjoy our beautiful state and its unique landscape, flora and fauna. What is 'Bad' is the lack of commitment by the government to uphold their stewardship responsibilities, when the vision and strategic plans are at hand. And the result is the 'Ugly', which is a degraded track system with adverse ecological consequences—a blight on WHA values.

The vision proposed in the *Tasmanian Walking Track Strategy*, adopted in 1998, is for Tasmania to be 'A World Class Walking Destination…' Let us turn this vision into a reality by adopting world's best practice in the management of our walking tracks and helping to showcase Tasmania's outstanding natural beauty.

TNPA UPDATE
RECHERCHE BAY

Anne McConnell

There is a general perception that Recherche Bay has been saved through the purchase of the Vernon Brothers' private property block on the North East Peninsula, the recent, limited Tasmanian Heritage Register listings and the listing of the NE Peninsula on the National Heritage List—however this is far from the truth. The cultural heritage values of Recherche Bay as a whole are still not encapsulated in the heritage listings, Marriner's Cockle Creek East proposed resort development is in the final planning and approval stages, and there is pressure from tourism operators to create facilities for large scale tourism in the bay.

As a consequence, the long-term future for Recherche Bay and protection of its highly significant cultural heritage values are still not assured. The myth that 'Recherche Bay is saved' must not be allowed to obscure the true situation or obviate the need for action to achieve full recognition and protection for Recherche Bay.

Recherche Bay—trading in our future for short term gain

'For the silver that the men have paid, who think they own the land It is the silver of Iscariot, the silver of the damned, It is part of the accounting in which we all must pay, trading in our children's futures for false promises today.'

Although written about the uranium mining industry in Australia in 1985, the words of Judy Small's 'The Future's Exchange' apply only too well to present day attempts to mine Recherche Bay for tourism. To the state government and tourism developers Recherche Bay appears to be nothing more than a resource to be exploited for political and private gain.

Such an approach however comes at a cost—the cost of the natural and cultural values of the place; the loss of something great created by a coming together of early European explorers and the indigenous people of Tasmania in this one location at one end of the world, and ultimately the loss of something precious for the next generations.

East Cockle Creek Resort development proposal update

At the time of writing, David Marriner's East Cockle Creek Resort proposal is in the final stages of the approval process. The revised plans, which locate the reception and visitors centre on the private property block at the end of the road, have been lodged with the Huon Valley Council and are awaiting approval. Once this approval is granted, no further approvals are required, and the development—the cabins and access still in their original location in the Southwest National Park behind Planters Beach and the relocated main building—can go ahead.

While the TNPA supports the relocation of the main building, the retention of the cabins and associated infrastructure in the park in our view still constitutes a significant development footprint within the park, and the TNPA consequently continues to oppose the proposed development.

Contrary to Paula Wriedt's claim in December 2006 (*The Mercury* 20 Dec 2006), the TNPA does not see the move as a good outcome or a good model for future partnerships between government and private enterprise. The TNPA would prefer a model where the government respects existing management plans and conservation policy, and seeks to protect the significant natural and cultural values of our reserved areas.

Heritage listings for Recherche Bay

As a single area, Recherche Bay possibly has the dubious distinction of having more separate heritage nominations and listings than any other non-urban area in Tasmania! Yet there is not a single listing that fully recognises the cultural heritage values of Recherche Bay as a whole.

The existing listings for Recherche Bay are as follows –

National Heritage List

- *Recherche Bay Area*—NE Peninsula only (nominated by John Mulvaney); the listing recognises the outstanding historical and associative cultural landscape values of the D'Entrecasteaux expedition's 1792 activities and the well-documented meeting with Aboriginal people in 1793.

Tasmanian Heritage Register

- *NE Peninsula Recherche Bay Heritage Area*—NE Peninsula western coastal margin only (based on the Recherche Bay Protection nomination); this is a c.100m wide coastal strip that essentially recognises the potential physical remains associated with the D'Entrecasteaux expedition's 1792 activities in the area of anchorage, including a garden and the Bennett's Point observatory. It does not recognise setting or cultural landscape values (which were included in the nomination).

Photo: Anne McConnell

- *Historic Cultural Heritage Layers of Cockle Creek East*—this is a c.70m wide coastal strip that runs from the end of the road to Fishers Point (based on a nomination by Gregg Hogg); this listing recognises the 'layers of historical cultural heritage' of the foreshore in this area (ie, the physical remains associated with historical whaling and timber getting and the potential physical remains associated with the D'Entrecasteaux expedition's 1793 activities in the area of anchorage). It does not include or recognise setting or cultural landscape values associated with the French expedition, or the 1793 watering place and site of the forge and other facilities of the expedition on the western shore (which were included in the nomination.)

As can be seen, the existing listings cover only a small part of Recherche Bay, leave out significant specific activity areas, and fail to take account of the setting of these activities and cultural landscape values. This is in spite of the National Heritage listing of the NE Peninsula which recognises national level associative cultural landscape values in relation to the activities of the D'Entrecasteaux expedition.

There is still a National Heritage List nomination outstanding that can potentially redress this issue. This 'Recherche Bay, Cockle Creek Rd Catamaran' nomination by Greg Hogg takes in the full area of the bay and a large part of the hinterland that was the subject of the exploration and use of the D'Entrecasteaux expedition. Recently Greg Hogg submitted revised boundaries to include most of the areas known to have been visited by the D'Entrecasteaux expedition.

Of concern however is the fact that although this nomination was submitted in 2005, it has still not been assessed. Although the new deadline for assessment is advertised as August 2007 it is now unlikely, due to changed processes for National Heritage List assessment (arising from the recent review of the *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act*), that the nomination will be assessed before August 2008, if at all.

Under the new assessment process there is no guarantee that a nomination will be assessed. The new process, designed to reduce stress on the significantly under-resourced Australian Heritage Council (AHC) while not increasing the resourcing, requires the AHC to annually establish a list of nominations to be assessed in the next year (which is termed the Priority Assessment List). The list also requires ministerial approval. If a nomination fails to make it onto the list in two successive years then it will not be considered again unless re-nominated.

Recherche Bay—a Celebration: the recent Joint Academies Recherche Bay Symposium

In late February 2007, the National Academies hosted *A Celebration of the History, Culture, Science and Technology of Recherche Bay* in Hobart. This three-day symposium included a one-day cruise to Recherche Bay from Hobart. This was a wonderful experience leaving one with the feeling of travelling in the wake of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century French explorers of the region. Happily it was also a relatively low impact tourism experience.

The presented papers were a veritable feast of rich, well-researched accounts of the D'Entrecasteaux expedition activities, their historical context, and their meaning in the present day. A small number of papers explored the recent conservation history of the area and looked at some of the associated issues including: the politics of conservation; environmental legislation issues; the framework for considering cultural landscapes and their many layers of meaning (stories); and the interrelationships between conservation, community and government. The many papers presented and the many experts in related subjects meant that the community of symposium participants was diverse, knowledgeable and highly interested, creating a highly stimulating environment for the exchange of ideas and information.

There were only a small number of negatives. The main one for a number of participants was the misconception by a number of the speakers that the acquisition of the Vernon brothers' block by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy had successfully resolved the conservation of the natural and cultural values of Recherche Bay, when in fact it has only addressed this for some 144 ha of Recherche Bay. This erroneous view appears to have arisen from a lack of understanding of the geography of Recherche Bay and the location of the 1792 & 1793 French expedition's activities, imprecise use of the term 'Recherche Bay', and the understandable excitement when the land now under the management of the Tasmanian Land Conservancy was purchased and saved from logging. Sadly a strongly supported

Photo: Anne McConnell

Photo: Anne McConnell

motion from the floor to affirm the historic heritage significance of the full Recherche Bay area was rejected by the organisers.

The National Academies have agreed to publish the papers presented at the 'Celebration'. This should prove to be an informative and interesting volume on the late eighteenth century history of Recherche Bay and its recent conservation history.

Where to from here—a focus on Recherche Bay as a whole

The TNPA continues to be concerned that the range of cultural and natural values of Recherche Bay are still not recognised and safeguarded. It is critically important to ensure that Recherche Bay is seen as more than the NE Peninsula or a set of isolated sites, and that the assessment and conservation of its values are considered at the 'whole of Recherche Bay' level.

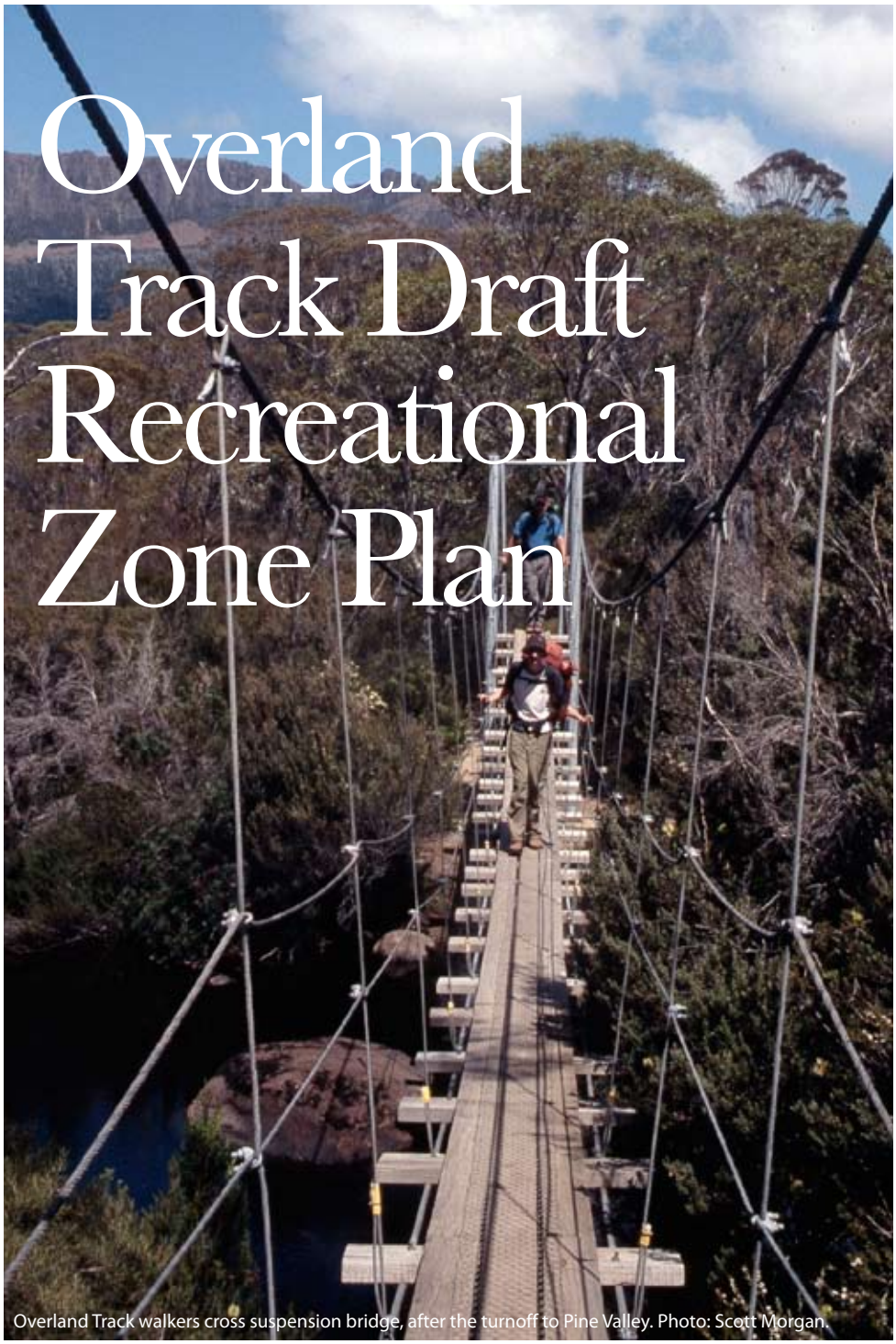
The TNPA will be working towards achieving this recognition through raising awareness of the issues in various fora, including with the state and federal governments, and will support and encourage other actions that work towards this goal. The TNPA will continue to promote its vision for Recherche Bay (detailed in the *Recherche Wilderness Experience,* refer TNPA News 5, 2005, pages 7-9) which promotes responsible use and tourism development, and will continue to oppose the Cockle Creek East proposed resort development which it sees as incompatible with the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage values of Recherche Bay.

If you are interested in assisting the TNPA in this area, please contact us at admin@tnpa.asn.au or phone the Secretary on 03 6239 1494.

Standing Camp News

January 2007 saw the commencement of trips to the 'luxury' standing camp at Bryans Corner in Freycinet National Park. TNPA is concerned at the level of commercial infrastructure being permitted in national parks, through the licencing of standing camps —there are now five within Freycinet. TNPA is also concerned after learning recently that temporary standing camp licences can be on-sold without review. TNPA has been provided with the current Parks and Wildlife Service standing camp policy, and will be reviewing and commenting on it and other standing camp issues over the next few months. Stay tuned for a detailed report in TNPA News 9.

Overland Track Draft Recreational Zone Plan



Overland Track walkers cross suspension bridge, after the turnoff to Pine Valley. Photo: Scott Morgan.

In its submission (in January) to the Parks and Wildlife Service in relation to the Overland Track Draft Recreational Zone Plan, the TNPA proposed the following management approach to the Overland Track:

The TNPA supports the concept of developing a strategic vision for the Overland Track and identifying the level of infrastructure required to support this vision. The TNPA broadly supports the general approach and recommendations outlined in the draft Recreational Zone Plan but we provide specific comments in relation to several aspects of the draft plan. However, the TNPA urges that the strategic vision to be adopted in the plan recognise that national parks (and significant regions within these parks such as the Overland Track) have a distinctive function to perform that is separate from the service of conventional tourism. This distinctive function needs to be based on the concept that nature, and associated wilderness, should dominate the experience sought by those visiting such places.

This philosophy also accords with the attitudes expressed by visitors to the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA which generally centred 'around the opportunity to visit or be active in a natural, beautiful and peaceful setting away from their normal lifestyle' (Hocking 1995, as quoted in the State of the TWWHA report, p180). In relation to recreational activities within the TWWHA, the survey also found that:

- protection of the natural values of the area should be the prime consideration;
- visitors were concerned about preserving the experience of the TWWHA as a natural, unspoilt and peaceful place;
- no specific additional facilities were sought by visitors.

Importantly, it was concluded that 'the TWWHA is valued primarily by visitors for its natural qualities, and people wanted it to stay that way. Visitors to the WHA do not want to see developments or commercialisation in wilderness areas, and resent the intrusion of activities which disturb the peace or intrude on the visual beauty of the place.' (Hocking 1995, *op cit*, p181).

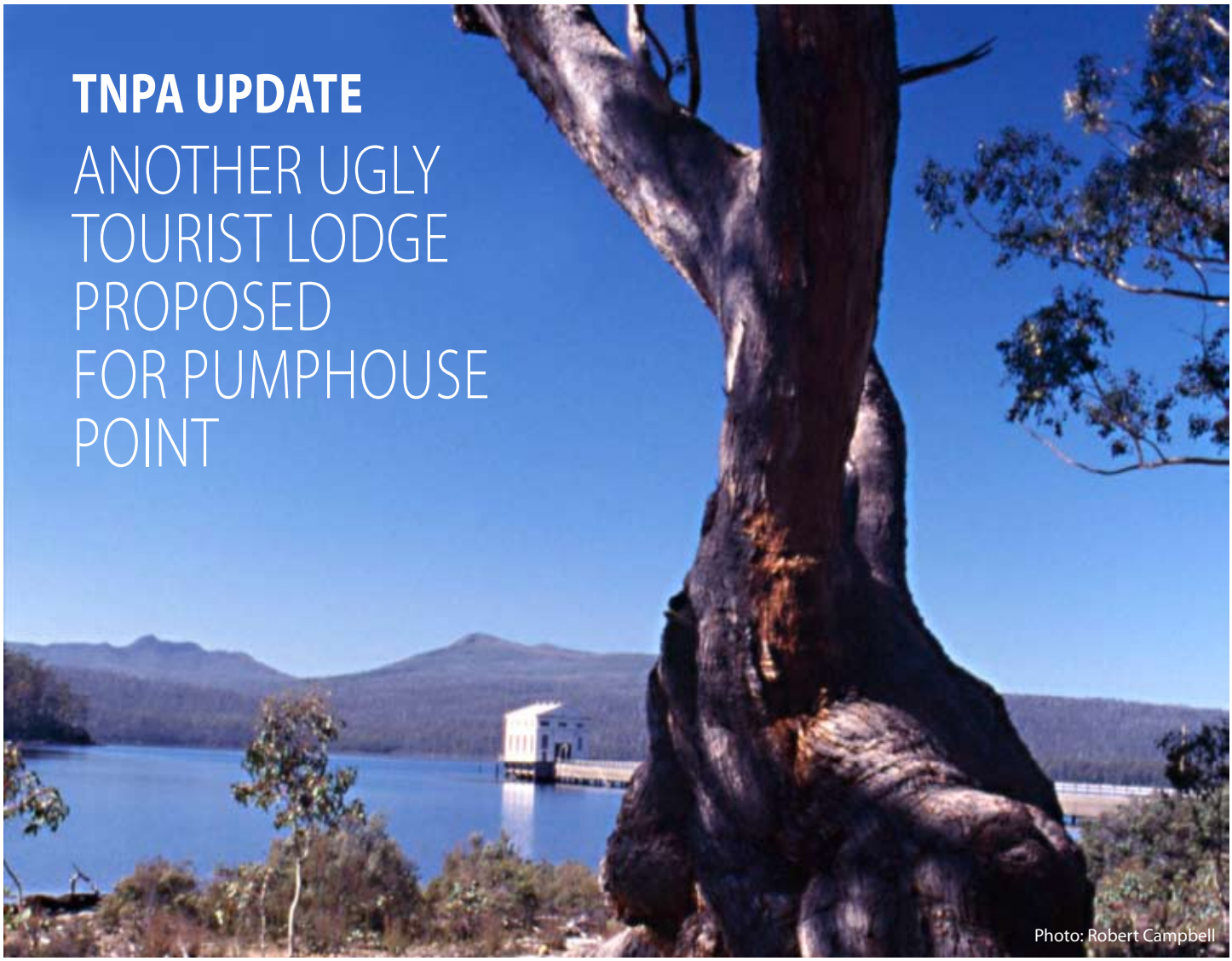
In light of the above philosophy and visitor attitudes, the TNPA believes that the strategic vision for the Overland Track needs to be based on the concept of offering a unique, challenging and world class wilderness experience to the visitor. If this vision is to be achieved the TNPA believes that any upgrading or placement of new infrastructure along the Overland Track should be strictly regulated and kept to a bare minimum. In particular, any need to provide infrastructure should abide by the following three key principles:

1. The maintenance of the natural environment and wilderness quality.
2. Prevention of environmental degradation.
3. Provision of reasonable standards of safety for visitors.

Furthermore, the provision of infrastructure to satisfy the 'lowest common denominator' is totally inappropriate. It is incumbent on all walkers to inform themselves of conditions to be experienced along the track (and the likelihood of poor or extreme weather conditions). Upgrading infrastructure in order to satisfy the whims of a few (who, on reflection, should perhaps not be there) will destroy the natural experience sought by the many.

Unfortunately, the realisation of the above vision appears to be under threat, as the same survey quoted previously found that the sense of wilderness was diminishing for a significant proportion of walkers on the Overland Track (p 183). Hopefully, stricter adherence to the above principles will see this trend reversed.

The full TNPA submission, including specific comments on the draft management plan can be found on the TNPA website.



TNPA UPDATE

ANOTHER UGLY TOURIST LODGE PROPOSED FOR PUMPHOUSE POINT

Photo: Robert Campbell

Greg Buckman and Robert Campbell

Pumphouse Point, on Lake St Clair, is a stunning setting. It has superb views across one of the most attractive lakes in Australia. It is also home to no less than 60 vertebrate animal species and contains unique moorland and wetland environments. So it beggars belief that the Parks and Wildlife Service has courted yet another tourist lodge developer for the site: the third in eighteen years. Unlike the previous two potential developers, the new one—a consortium led by well-known Tasmanian tourism entrepreneur Simon Currant—looks serious, so serious that by the time you read this it will probably have lodged a development application for the site with the Central Highlands Council. The Parks and Wildlife Service are planning to release a development site plan for comment. The public are likely to be able to object to the development application (to the council) during May and lodge submissions on the site plan (to the Parks and Wildlife Service) during May and June.

Like the previous two developers, Currant's consortium is likely to emphasise that the development of the old HEC buildings at Pumphouse Point will have minimal impact while significantly increasing Tasmania's tourism industry potential. In reality, however, the development is likely to:

- involve the construction of additional buildings to those that already exist at the site;
- include major clearing of vegetation;
- degrade the site's natural diversity and natural processes, as well as the wilderness, environmental and landscape qualities of the area;
- result in a large increase in construction and visitor traffic to the site;
- result in the destruction of natural conditions and habitat across a large portion of the site and will therefore threaten the habitats for terrestrial and aquatic fauna;
- engender a sense of private property and act as a deterrent to the public;
- be visible from the lake and surrounding mountains; and
- be inconsistent with both the maintenance of World Heritage Area values and the attainment of the associated management objectives.

As with all tourism developments the TNPA believes the tourist lodge proposed for Pumphouse Point should be located outside the national park's boundary. The TNPA supports appropriate tourism-based projects in Tasmania and supports the regional benefits that will flow from such projects. However, we also strongly believe these benefits can be achieved by locating such developments outside the boundaries of Tasmania's national parks. The establishment of successful tourist sites outside national parks at Strahan and Cradle Valley, to name only two, validates this view. The 1999 management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, in which Pumphouse Point is situated, backed this stance by saying it encouraged 'the provision of accommodation in nearby townships and areas adjacent to the WHA' (p132) and 'if adequate facilities or services exist, or can be developed outside the WHA that meet visitor needs, such facilities and services will not be provided as concessions within the WHA' (p178). Despite these noble sentiments, however, the state government seems hell-bent on allowing an inappropriate and hugely intrusive development to proceed at Pumphouse Point. Let's hope the Central Highlands Council and public outrage can stop it.

Illegal Helicopter landings

—IN THE TASMANIAN WILDERNESS WORLD HERITAGE AREA

Anne McConnell

In January 2007 TNPA was advised by a bushwalker that he had observed a tourist helicopter land within the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park. The helicopter appeared to be carrying tourists and was clearly not an emergency or management-related flight. Closer inspection revealed that there was a 'cut' helipad and some treated pine, presumably for constructing a fixed helipad, nearby.

The TNPA was provided with co-ordinates which place the landing site within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Under the *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999*, landings of aircraft within the WHA are not allowed except for management purposes or where approved by the Director of the PWS. We understand that our informant approached the pilot to ask more about the activity, but found the pilot defensive, leading our informant to conclude that the flight was unapproved, hence illegal.

The TNPA wrote to the General Manager of the Parks & Wildlife Service to advise them of this possibly illegal activity. The PWS response confirmed that no helicopter landings had been authorised within the WHA in the area of the observed landing but that the landings were occurring within the WHA. The PWS further indicated that the commercial operator who is at fault has been operating in the Cradle Mountain area for over 10 years and was approved to land in the adjacent Granite Tor Conservation Area near Fury Gorge.

The response from the PWS also noted that they had been unaware of the illegal landings until they received the TNPA letter. On the basis of initial enquiries about this matter, TNPA President Chris Bell believes that the illegal landings have been known to the PWS for some time. How long, one wonders, has the operation been mistakenly landing in the WHA, and why is it that the PWS has not noticed the operator's mistake until now?

The lack of action or apparent lack of knowledge of the landings within the WHA by the PWS indicates that one of the key objectives of the *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999*—monitoring activities and impacts—is not being met in this case. Why is this? Is it a lack of due care, a lack of interest, or a lack of funding? Although the PWS has assured TNPA that now 'the PWS has a more rigorous monitoring program for all licensed aircraft that operate in and near the TWWHA and this incident is an isolated case,' this begs the question of why there was not a more rigorous monitoring program already in place. This is not the first time the PWS has not adequately monitored commercial operations in the WHA (commercial huts and standing camps have previously been issues) and has had to be reminded by the public of their obligations in this respect. This is a failure of basic management.

The PWS has also advised the TNPA that a new landing has been located outside the WHA in the adjacent conservation area and that 'the new site will have a timber helipad constructed and parallel boarding put in place, before the operator will commence landing there, to reduce degradation of the site' and that the old site within the TWWHA 'will have surface stabilisation measures taken and will be rehabilitated.' The TNPA understands that no boardwalk will be constructed within the TWWHA.

While the TNPA is pleased to see that the damage will be rehabilitated, the approach by the PWS raises questions—1) who will be paying for the restoration work and new infrastructure? We hope that it is the operator and not another example of the Tasmanian taxpayer having to clean up after inept operators and assist by paying for infrastructure for commercial use; and 2) surely breaches such as this of the management plan should be subject to a significant penalty to deter future such incidents, yet there is no mention of any penalty to the operator for their illegal activities.

This experience leads the TNPA to seriously question whether commercial helicopter landings in or adjacent to the WHA are compatible with the sound management of the WHA and whether such activities should be approved at all. The TNPA thinks not, especially since it has been clearly demonstrated that the PWS has been unable to monitor the activity and ensure its operation within the set guidelines. The TNPA is also opposed to such flights because they are a significant intrusion (particularly the noise) and therefore compromise the remote area and wilderness values of this wilderness area of outstanding value.

A note on park resources

Recently a TNPA member reported that he had come across walkers with a dog on a track inside Freycinet National Park. He informed them that dogs are not permitted in the national park, but they proceeded on their way. He then rang the ranger station, only to be told they did not have the resources to deal with the situation.

If there are no resources to deal with such an obvious breach, TNPA wonders what other less obvious, but potentially more serious, breaches are going undetected elsewhere in our parks and reserves, due to the poor resourcing of the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Great Australian Bushwalk 2007

The 2007 Great Australian Bushwalk will be held across the nation on Sunday 9 September to celebrate spectacular natural places and conservation management. First initiated as a state event by the New South Wales National Parks Association in 2003, the GAB has since become a national event. In 2006 approximately 2,560 walkers joined 120 free guided walks across Australia, with eight walks in Tasmania.

Once again the TNPA will be co-ordinating Tasmanian walks and we need walk leaders!

Who can lead a GAB walk?

Anyone with bushwalking experience who is comfortable leading a group of people on a walk. They also must be a Wildcare member (or happy to become one). This is a requirement for our insurance.

What types of walks are included in the GAB?

Short walks and longer walks, easy walks and more difficult walks. Walks on the coast and in the mountains. Flat walks, steep walks—in national parks, reserved land and interesting places. All walks are considered, and anything is possible!

Who participates in the GAB?

It's a mix of inexperienced walkers and seasoned walkers, locals and visitors—the young and the not so young. Walks are promoted with their grade of difficulty, length and altitude, allowing participants to choose a route to suit their fitness and preferences.

Who co-ordinates the day?

The day is nationally co-ordinated by the NSW NPA. In 2006 bookings were primarily made online, and then walk leaders were notified of participant numbers. Additionally each state and territory has their own network of co-ordinators. TNPA member Margie Jenkin co-ordinated the event in 2006. Can you help for 2007? Contact us today by phone or e-mail for more information.

What is expected of walk leaders?

Walk leaders are expected to liaise with the state co-ordinators about operations on the day. They are sent material which they are expected to read and follow, including leader guidelines regarding group management and safety.

When do walk leaders and co-ordinators need to sign up for the GAB?

Any time!! The sooner the better.

What else?

The Great Australian Bushwalk is a terrific event which encourages appreciation and care of the natural environment. It's a fun day out, and a great opportunity to meet new people and see new places. In recent years, walk leaders have received a free hat or t-shirt to wear on the day, and to keep for their support and efforts.

How do I enrol?

Contact us on admin@tnpa.asn.au or by phone 0427 854 684.

For more information see the Great Australian Bushwalk website www.greataustralianbushwalk.org.au or the Tasmanian National Parks Association www.tnpa.asn.au.

Tasmanian National Parks Association Inc

Patron: Peter Cundall

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Vice Presidents: Margie Jenkin, Anne McConnell
Treasurer: Greg Buckman
Secretary: *vacant* (A/Sec—Anne McConnell)
Public Officer: Tom Baxter
Other committee members: Robert Campbell (*& 1 position vacant*)

Contact Details
Poatal Address: GPO Box 2188, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001
Email: admin@tnpa.asn.au
Website: www.tnpa.asn.au
Phone: 03 6239 1494 or 0427 854 684

Meetings
Management Committee meetings are held one Monday each month at 6:30 pm at Sustainable Living Tasmania (2nd floor, 102 Bathurst St, Hobart). Members and supporters are welcome. Meeting dates will be advertised in each TNPA Communique, or please check with the Secretary.

Have your say...

ABC National—Tim Cox
tasmornings@your.abc.net.au or 1300 36 1700

Letters to the Editor at The Mercury
mercuryedletters@dbl.newsltd.com.au or
GPO Box 334 Hobart 7001

Letters to the Editor at The Examiner
mail@examiner.com.au or PO Box 99A Launceston 7250

Letters to the Editor at Herald Sun
hsletters@hwt.newsltd.com.au

Letters to the Editor at The Age
letters@theage.fairfax.com.au

Minister for Tourism, Arts and the Environment
Paula.Wriedt@parliament.tas.gov.au

Minister for Primary Industries and Water
David.Llewellyn@parliament.tas.gov.au

Minister for Economic Development and Resources
Paul.Lennon@parliament.tas.gov.au

Postal address for Ministers: C/- Parliment House, Hobart, 7000

TNPA News

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