TNPA NEWS

TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION INC

Newsletter No 17 Winter 2013

Pool with pencil pines, Walls of Jerusalem National Park, Nick Sawyer

THANK YOU

The TNPA Committee would like to thank the following people and organisations who have over the last 6 months volunteered their time to assist the TNPA, or who have helped us in other ways.

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Tim Devereux, Rob Hill, Bec Johnson, Lesley Nicklason, Bruce Wilson, John Cannon (for publicity)

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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

EDITORIAL

This issue of TNPA News reflects a very busy time for the organisation in the first half of 2013. TNPA has been working hard at trying to keep both government and the Parks and Wildlife Service on track regarding their responsibilities towards our reserved areas, including informing and consulting with the public. Meanwhile TNPA has also been very engaged with bigger picture issues such as the assault on national parks in Australia generally, and locally the Tasmanian Forest Peace Agreement. In this issue you will also find a tribute to the late Helen Gee, one of our era's most passionate, dedicated and effective campaigners for Tasmania's wild and natural places. Helen's life and work give us inspiration to keep working to save and preserve our national parks and wilderness areas.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PEN:

Tasmania Celebrates while Mainland Parks Under Attack

In a week that has seen Australia replace its Prime Minister, it has also been an interesting week for both Tasmania's and Australia's national parks. Unfortunately the news is mixed so I will begin with the good news.

Reading the morning paper on Tuesday 25 June it was decisively a good news day as the article I was reading that day was headlined "*Tasmania's global treasures saved*". The article read "After decades of conflict, sometimes fought tree-by-tree, chain saws have been stilled in the old growth forests of Tasmania's world heritage wilderness The boundary described by Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke as Australia's most contentious heritage line was settled on Monday when UNESCO's World Heritage Committee backed protection."[1]

This decision, which was a centerpiece conservation achievement of the recent three-year talks between the logging industry and environmental NGOs, will result in a 170,000 hectare expansion of the existing Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (WHA). This includes the long disputed heritage forests of the Picton, Weld, Styx, Upper Florentine, Butlers Gorge and the Great Western Tiers (see map on page 4). The inclusion of these ancient forests and their associated wildlife within Tasmania's nature reserves and WHA is clearly something to celebrate. This achievement would, of course, not have been possible without the persistence and dedication of numerous people over the past 30 years who have fought for the protection of these forests. To those we, and all future generations, extend a big "Thank you."

However, while this outcome shows that often protracted conservation issues can be addressed, protection of the other native forests (out of the total of 514,000 hectares) to be reserved under the Tasmanian Forests Agreement is yet to be confirmed.

While we all celebrate this achievement, nevertheless recent events remind us that the protection offered by National Park status can be illusory, as several State governments have embarked on aggressive agendas to 'open up' parks to commerce and recreation.

Again, a newspaper article this week tells the story. With legislation passing in Victoria's Lower House on Thursday June 27 to allow 99-year leases for developers and tourism operators in national parks, the article states that "Victoria's national parks are primed for development in a move the State Coalition government hopes will stimulate tourism but which opponents have likened to a sell-off."[2] However, previous comments[3] by Dianne Smith from the Victorian Tourism Industry Council that Victoria already has the highest national park visitation in the country would indicate that further developments in parks are not required to bring people into parks. This move also follows former Premier Ted Baillieu's allowance of cattle grazing in the Alpine NP (later halted by the Federal government) and the opening of nine national parks for fossicking and prospecting by present Premier Denis Napthine.

In Queensland, Premier Campbell Newman is allowing cattle grazing in five national parks and intends to open more, while park management has been removed from the environment portfolio and placed in the department for recreation, sport and racing. Meanwhile, in NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell is allowing amateur hunters into 77 national parks to kill feral animals while a NSW parliamentary committee has recommended logging the State's national parks and a moratorium on new parks. Implicit in a moratorium is the notion that there are ``too many" parks.

These inroads into Australia's national parks are despite Queensland and NSW both having the lowest proportion of land within reserves, while Victoria has the highest proportion of threatened species.

National parks are the only land tenure which accords priority to nature. The changes currently afoot white-ant this principle and effectively reduce the area managed primarily for nature. They also exacerbate pre-existing problems of meagre management budgets and shift the management focus away from nature conservation to recreation and tourism.

On the other hand, commercial property developers see national parks as opportunities to make a profit. If they can build tourist accommodation and other recreational facilities within well-known parks, the attraction, infrastructure, operational management costs and marketing are all publically subsidised.

In a recent article on these changes Carol Booth has written, "Probably worse than any of the proposed activities, damaging though they are, is the subsuming of conservation functions of national parks to recreational, commercial and political goals. Generating revenue, making political deals and placating noisy user groups are becoming a higher priority than saving nature[4]."

Christine Goonrey, president of National Parks Australia Council has also written "Respect for the role of national parks in conservation of biodiversity is at an all time low."[5]

In a move that seems to be a reward for this bad behaviour, the Federal Coalition on Wednesday 26 June outlined its plans for a "one-stop-shop" for environmental approvals that would devolve environmental powers to the States to make decisions on major projects such as mines and ports. Given the States' recent attack on national parks, this policy seems akin to putting the foxes in charge of the hen house and raises a number of concerns which critics claim proves the need for Federal oversight under the EPBC act.

One only needs to remember that the highly controversial Franklin Dam would have gone ahead without Federal government intervention. However, despite this example the Federal government has generally been reluctant to completely block new development under its EPBC powers, which allow it to veto activity that threatens endangered species or areas of heritage and "national importance". Statistics from the Department of the Environment show that of the 3,744 projects assessed since the EPBC Act's introduction in 2000 just 17 have been deemed by the Federal government to be not acceptable [6].

The announcement of this policy follows the disappointing news delivered in the papers the previous week that the Federal Labor Cabinet had decided not to support a Green amendment to the EPBC Act to introduce a 'trigger' to make national parks a matter of national environmental significance[7]. This amendment would also have ensured that decision powers under the EPBC Act could not be handed over to State governments. This rejection came despite an overwhelming national campaign from conservationists and others, including former Labor State premiers, for this issue to be supported.

Given the attacks on the conservation values of national parks on the mainland, and with a tourism industry continuing to demand greater access to parks, future threats to Tasmania's parks remain uncertain. However, recent comments by Luke Martin of the Tourism Industry Council Tasmania "that any expansion of nature-based tourism will require private capital investment, including in areas of high conservation value"[8] only adds to this uncertainty. With a major review of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan due to be completed by 2015 we will need to remain vigilant if the magnificent values within our parks are to remain protected and to keep the circling wolves of the tourism sector at bay.

The TNPA has long fought to hold back the tide of eager developers longing to grab a bit of prime Tasmanian national park real estate for their own. In doing so we have strongly argued that the sought-after economic and employment benefits do not require tourism developments to be located within national parks – the same benefits can be realised by placing such developments outside national parks (as has been done in the past) so that local regions and their communities may also benefit from nearby parks instead of just a single developer. Within Tasmania the development of very successful tourist nodes outside national parks at Strahan, Cradle Valley, and Coles Bay validates this argument.

National parks protect the best of our natural heritage: stunning landscapes, extraordinary wildlife, majestic forests. They are places where our unique native flora and fauna and cultural heritage have priority. As such, they are set aside specifically to preclude human interference and destruction of the natural environment – more specifically they are set aside to exclude commercial developments.

While acknowledging tourism as an integral part of a vibrant economy, it is important that national parks are not treated just as tourist commodities, required to respond to the demands by developers to satisfy every passing whim of visitors; but continue to be managed for the conservation and recreational purposes that they were originally proclaimed.

At the time that the national parks concept was first being implemented in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, visitors to national parks inevitably left the city far behind them and were genuinely immersed in a natural setting, where the planned entertainments disappeared in favor of a place where visitors could set their own agenda and discover the place for themselves.

By contrast, the demands of the modern tourist and the mass-scale marketing of national parks are threatening to undermine this relationship. National parks are under threat of offering little more than an extension of the city and its modern lifestyle transported onto a slowly degrading scenic background. There are demands for high-class accommodation units, air-conditioning, packaged foods, business conventions, and efforts to bring year-round commercial tourism to places where previously nature was dominant.

As Edward Abbey (US park ranger and author) once bluntly wrote "What's wrong with parks is that they have been too much given over to the clientele of `industrial tourism', people who visit from their cars and whose three standard questions are: `Where's the john? How long will it take to see this place? And Where's the Coke machine?"

National parks have a distinctive function to perform that is separate from the service of conventional tourism. As such certain kinds of developments and activities, if allowed in parks, will undermine the attitudes that parks can, and should, encourage.

The State government and the tourism industry need to acknowledge this unique role of national parks, and to ensure that they remain the havens for conservation, self-discovery and self-reflection that they were originally set aside to be.

Australia's national parks are world-renowned for their pristine beauty and as such attract visitors from around the world who enjoy their unique and spectacular natural features. We need to ensure that our national parks are handed on to future generations in as good or better condition than at present and not sacrificed for short-term expediency on the tourist and political altars.

In finishing, two other events are also worth celebrating. First, on July 1 this year wilderness lovers everywhere celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Franklin River campaign victory – the day when the High Court announced "there shall be no dam on the Franklin River". Secondly, in November 2014 Australia will host the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's World Parks Congress-a once-in-a-decade meeting that is expected to attract 3000 protected-area specialists from 160 countries. In preparing for this congress let us work together to ensure that Australia's national parks continue to get the proper management and protection that the unique values within them deserve.

Robert Campbell, President

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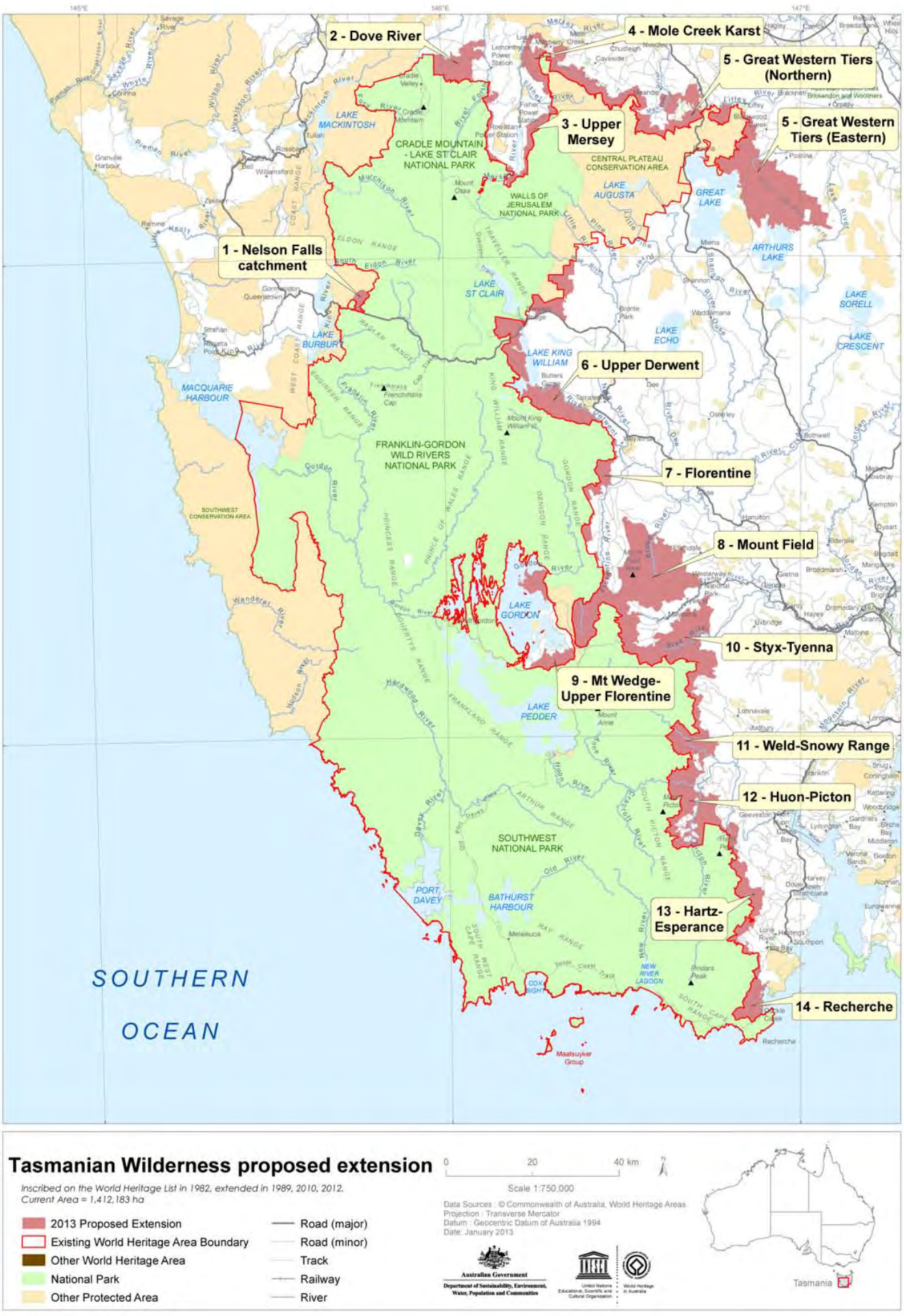
1 Andrew Darby. Tasmania's 'global treasures' saved. The Age. 25 June 2013
2 Rebecca Thistleton. Opponent's label Vic park plan a 'sell-off'. The Australian Financial Review, 29-30 June 2013.
3 Farrah Tomazin. Fancy a room with a view? Developers set to descend on Victoria's national parks. The Age. 31 March 2013.
4 Carol Booth. 2013. Park Attack. Wildlife Australia, Vol. 50 No. 1, 23-28.
5 Quoted in (3)
6 Oliver Milman. Coalition to hand mines and ports approval powers back to the states. Guardian.com.au, 28 June 2013
7 Tom Arup. Cabinet quashes park push. The Age, 19 June 2013.
8 Tourism Industry Council Tasmania, Tripartisan Support for Sustainable Tourism. Press Release, 2 July 2013. *Tourism Industry Council Tasmania*



Proposed WHA extension map
For a closer look at this map visit: http://www.acfonline.org.au/sites/default/files/resources/ACF_landforests_Tasmania_World_Heritage_extension_map.pdf

TNPA REPORT

By Nick Sawyer

Photo: Broken boardwalk. Image courtesy of Nick Sawyer

Broken board or ticking time bomb?

The "hardening" of walking tracks around Tasmania has been widespread since the 1980s. It serves both to protect the environment and to provide a better experience for walkers.

Much of the earliest track hardening comprised cordwood laid directly on the ground. It soon became apparent that this was unsatisfactory for several reasons (including a short lifespan) so construction switched to the now familiar wooden boardwalk with occasional stone work. Stone construction is, in general, more aesthetic and very expensive but essentially permanent.

Much of the early cordwood is now in very poor condition, often exacerbated by lack of maintenance, especially blocked drains. For example, this is the main reason why mud holes are now reappearing on the Overland Track. Elevated boardwalk or ground-level planking made from treated timber is much more durable than cordwood, but it does not last forever and there are plenty of examples, such as that pictured, where individual boards have broken or entire sections are collapsing.

Most of the hardened track in Tasmania's national parks, particularly in remote areas, was constructed during the heyday of World Heritage funding from the Commonwealth Government, which has now almost dried up. Budget cuts across all State government departments and a shift in priorities to high grade tracks in frontcountry areas (such as the track to the Wineglass Bay Lookout and the ludicrously expensive reconstruction of the Cape Hauy Track) have combined to ensure that the budget available for remote area track work is now miniscule, and even this is often dependent on external funding.

Broken boardwalk may be just a nuisance for walkers but it is a major liability concern for the PWS. In most circumstances the PWS is not liable for an injury sustained by a visitor while bushwalking but if a walker is injured by the failure of something constructed by the PWS, the victim may be entitled to substantial compensation.

I do not foresee a problem with the maintenance of constructed walking track in popular day-visitor areas. The total length of track involved is relatively small and there will be pressure from the tourism industry and government to maintain these to a reasonable standard, so they should be a priority for the expenditure of park entry fees.

A similar situation exists with the Overland Track. This is a well-known, heavily used track with its own fee, some of which is spent on essential track maintenance such as repair of the deteriorating cordwood noted above.

The real concern is the vast length of track in more remote areas that receives relatively low use and no funding from PWS' routine operating budget. There is almost no chance of further hardening, however bad the environmental damage, and maintenance of existing track work has been neglected for years, resulting in unnecessary deterioration. It appears that PWS has already started dismantling boardwalk(e.g. Lake Judd Track near Anne River bridge) to avoid liability for injuries as it deteriorates.

The Overland Track permit system has been in place for almost a decade and a draft Recreation Zone Plan for the Walls of Jerusalem has recently been announced (other obvious candidates for this approach include the South Coast, Western Arthurs, Freycinet and Frenchmans Cap). PWS appears to be moving in the direction of intensive management of a few heavily used tracks (with no acknowledgement of displacement issues that may result) while abandoning responsibility for the more remote areas. PWS may argue that this approach has been forced upon it by the budget situation but it has no excuse for prioritising expenditure on unnecessarily high grade tracks in frontcountry areas ahead of maintenance of iconic tracks such as the South Coast and environmental protection in some of the most sensitive parts of the World Heritage Area – which is what it is doing by abandoning even basic maintenance of existing track infrastructure in remote areas.

TNPA REPORT

By Paul Smith

Report: Gowan Brae and Circular Marsh

As readers may be aware from previous issues of TNPA News[1], the TNPA has taken a keen interest in the private land to the south of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) on the Central Plateau, and has been actively pursuing the maintenance of the wilderness values of this area through the concept of 'remoting zones', a concept developed by TNPA member Paul Smith.

Recently, Gowan Brae, a very large block of private land that abuts the TWWHA, and some other blocks, including Circular Marsh on the eastern edge of Gowan Brae, were put up for sale. A very interesting development is that, with the assistance of the Tasmanian Land Conservancy, Gowan Brae and Circular Marsh have been purchased by the Aboriginal community.[2] The Tasmanian Land Conservancy's (TLC) Skullbone Plains abuts the western boundary of Gowan Brae, and together with Circular Marsh, these properties border 40 kilometres of the southern edge of the Central Plateau section of the TWWHA. This situation raises the possibility of these properties being managed as a remoting zone that would enhance not only their wild character, but that of the TWWHA as well.

As a minimum requirement, remoting zones would not permit *public* access by any type of vehicle, from push-bikes to motor vehicles, motor driven boats and aircraft. Ideally, any roads that traverse these zones would be blocked and revegetated, perhaps remaining open only as walking tracks.

Paul Smith spoke to Clyde Mansell, Chair of the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania (ALCT), enquiring about their new land acquisition and their intentions for managing it:

Clyde Mansell: Gowan Brae and Circular Marsh have been bought by the ALCT with Federal government funds earmarked for the acquisition of land by Aborigines, so ALCT is the sole owner. The TLC assisted the ALCT in this acquisition and is restricted to a consultative relationship with ALCT for managing the property. The Aboriginal community has a strong desire to cooperate with adjacent landowners such as TLC and PWS in that management. In relation to public access, the public will not be permitted to drive onto Gowan Brae.

Paul Smith: In my opinion this is a terrific step forward as it will assist PWS in preventing vehicles entering the TWWHA. What are the ALCT's views on whether members of the public could walk across Gowan Brae to access the TWWHA?

Clyde Mansell: The ALCT has not formed a view on that at this stage. One problem for ALCT is the issue of liability, having been sued in the past by people entering our properties and getting injured.

Paul Smith: Could this problem be fixed by notices at entrance points that welcomed walkers, but stressed that they entered at their own risk?

Clyde Mansell: This may not be legally acceptable. However, as I have said, ALCT wants to cooperate with adjoining landowners such as TLC and PWS in how we manage Gowan Brae. As TNPA is interested in this, we invite you to write to the ALCT to express your views.

Paul Smith: Thank you very much, I appreciate the offer. I am sure we will do that in the near future.

In view of the TNPA's interest in having a remoting zone along this part of the boundary of the TWWHA, perhaps we could consider it *remarkably* fortunate that the new owners of Gowan Brae are opposed to public vehicular access. However, as this places ALCT in a position of potential confrontation with the off-road vehicle fraternity it may appreciate support from conservation and bushwalking groups as it implements this policy. In return, perhaps, those groups may desire that ALCT has a policy that members of the public are welcome to walk across Gowan Brae/Circular Marsh, to and from the TWWHA. It appears that these groups should try to form a joint view on this issue of a remoting zone that might include Skullbone Plains, Gowan Brae and Circular Marsh.

The TNPA congratulates the Aboriginal community and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy on this new land acquisition and wishes them well in managing this property for the maintenance of its natural and cultural values and as another step in the Aboriginal community's battle for recognition and land rights.

Editor's note: Skullbone Plains, owned and managed by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy, is now included in the World Heritage Area but Gowan Brae and Circular Marsh are not included.

Know your Wilderness Philosophers

The front page of TNPA News No 14 featured the famous quotation "In the wildness is the preservation of the world", attributed to John Muir. Apologies. It should, of course, have been Henry David Thoreau.

1 TNPA News No. 15 (winter 2012, "Wilderness, Remoteness and 'High Conservation Value Forests'" (<http://www.tnpa.asn.au/uploads/7/6/3/9/7639222/tnpa_news_15_email_version_1.pdf>), which also describes two other proposals for remoting zones, which are currently well on the way to fruition via the recent extensions to the TWWHA.

2 TNPA understands that the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania will have management authority on behalf of the Aboriginal community, with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre also having a role, particularly in relation to on-ground land and heritage management.

TNPA REPORT

By Nick Sawyer

Bring back Track Rangers and the Minimum Impact Bushwalking (MIB) Campaign

Scenes like those pictured below had almost vanished from the Tasmanian bush but are becoming far too common again.

Over recent years TNPA members have noticed a steady increase in the amount of litter on walking tracks in Tasmanian national parks and reserves. The most common items observed are paper tissues and toilet paper, confectionery wrappers and cigarette butts. The paper tissues and toilet paper are of particular concern, the tissues being particularly common on short, easy tracks. PWS signage reminds visitors not to deposit litter on walking tracks but the quantity of litter now being observed suggests that the message is not getting through.

There has also been a proliferation of campfires, with associated cutting and gathering of firewood, especially on the Central Plateau, despite most of the WHA being a "fuel stove only area" (campfires are not just discouraged – they are illegal, and have been for over twenty years). Much of this increase has occurred since the winding back of the Track Ranger program in the early 2000s, a reminder that some possibility of enforcement is necessary if rules are to be respected.

Solutions:

- It is time for a new campaign targeting litter and toilet behaviour. Reviving the MIB campaign ("Leave No Trace" is now the internationally-recognised name) would be a good start – this was very successful for many years – but an additional focus on the very short walks used mostly by casual visitors also appears necessary.
- There is no substitute for an on-ground management presence in remote areas, to educate and police the behaviour of users. The Track Ranger program was very effective for many years but is now all but abandoned (the only remaining "Track Rangers" are on the Overland Track but their main roles are hut/toilet maintenance and the checking of permits). The old Track Ranger program, with its emphasis on education, must be revived.

TNPA has suggested these actions to PWS but received only a lukewarm response. TNPA members are urged to directly lobby PWS and the Minister.

Clockwise from top: Alpine garden with toilet paper, campfire, cut tree (pencil pine). Images courtesy of Nick Sawyer

TNPA AUTUMN WALKS 2013

TNPA REPORT

TNPA Autumn Walks are an annual event where experienced bushwalkers volunteer their time and experience to offer bushwalks to the public, giving people an opportunity to experience some of our beautiful reserved areas, as well as highlighting the name and role of TNPA.

Walks this year included:

- Seven Mile Beach to Lauderdale with Rob Hill
- Waterfall Bluff and Tatnells Hill (Tasman Peninsula) with Catharine Errey
- Caves of Chauncy Vale with Bec Johnson (assisted by Tim Devereux)
- Mt Wellington High Level Scenic Walk with Anne McConnell
- South Wellington Circuit with Catharine Errey (route changed because of high winds)
- Collins Bonnet from Myrtle Forest with Bruce Wilson
- Blue Tier Giant (North East Tasmania) with Lesley Nicklason.

The walks catered for a range of experience. Because Bec Johnson's family walk at Chauncy Vale is always very popular, and not just with families, Tim Devereux offered to take a second group. Rob Hill has made a speciality of leading walks which use public transport to access start and finish points. For Rob's walk this year the weather was fine and the group had great views of Storm Bay and Tasman Peninsula. Anne McConnell provided a snow-walking experience for her high-level Mt Wellington Walk. Both Bruce Wilson and Catharine Errey had to make changes to their planned walks because of high winds, Bruce postponing his walk to the following weekend and Catharine choosing an alternative route.

Thanks to all walks co-ordinators and to John Cannon for his Saturday 'Mercury' column promoting the walks.

Top three images courtesy of Bec Johnson; bottom courtesy of Rob Hill

TNPA TRIBUTE

Tribute to Helen Gee

The Tasmanian community and a large number of groups and individuals were deeply saddened by the passing of Helen Gee in December 2012.

The following, drawn from the eulogy written largely by Helen's life partner Bob Graham, gives some glimpses into the life and achievements of this remarkable woman and citizen of the Earth.

Helen Gee was born in Launceston in 1950. Her father died when she was three. Helen grew up in Westbury (she was known as 'the Westbury tomboy'!) where she loved to roam and explore. Her mother, Diana, took her and her brothers and sisters camping, walking and skiing, fostering Helen's love of the bush.

After completing her university degree Helen spent a year walking and climbing in New Zealand. Returning to Tasmania in the early 1970's, she helped in the campaign to try to stop the flooding of Lake Pedder for a hydro electricity scheme.

A couple of years later she joined the South West Action Committee, campaigning against the triple threats of mining, logging and hydro developments. She worked with the United Tasmania Group (forerunner of the Greens Party) and helped set up the Tasmanian Wilderness Society.

Helen saw that her skills were best employed as an educator in a world in which an informed public is essential to democratic decision making.

Together with Janet Fenton, Greg Hodge and Chris Cowles, she set about compiling the South West Book. After three years, this mammoth compilation of facts about one of the world's great remaining wild areas was published in 1978. This was the first of a number of books written by Helen over the years to come:

Five years before the Franklin Blockade, Helen produced the first book on the Franklin.

2001 marked the publication of yet another book written by Helen, 'To the Forests', an encyclopedic work of stories of 100 leading activists for Tasmania's forests.

After working as an Aboriginal site recorder on Cape Barren Island and getting to know members of the Cape Barren community (who hold her in the highest esteem)Helen wrote a book on the life and times of Ronni Summers, Tasmanian Aboriginal elder and musician, who grew up on the island.

She also edited a book called 'River of Verse', a collection of Tasmanian poetry covering 200 years.

During the years when Helen and partner Bob were running the farm near Buckland, and raising a family, Helen worked as an Australian Conservation Foundation Councillor, a Wilderness Society campaigner, and, later, a conservation representative on the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Consultative Committee.

Together with Bob, she played a main role in saving the forests of the Douglas-Apsley from logging, resulting in the eventual protection of this area (in 1989) as the Douglas-Apsley National Park.

The more recent, and still unfolding, protection of the Wielangta Forest also came about through the efforts of Helen, Bob and a small band of other locals, galvanizing statewide, national and international support.

Helen's passion and efforts for protecting the natural environment of Tasmania and Australia as a whole came at a cost: in 2006 she was named as one of the so-called 'Gunns 20', environmental campaigners sued by timber company Gunns, a lawsuit which ultimately failed and rebounded on the company.

In 2012 Helen was placed on the Tasmanian Honour Role of Women.

Perhaps the greatest memorial for Helen is in the intact places, the protection of which she played a major role in, including the now vast Tasmanian World Heritage Area, Recherche Bay, the Douglas-Apsley National Park and Wielangta. We hope that one day too she will be remembered for her bold, holding action for the restoration of Lake Pedder.

Thoughts for Helen

TNPA member Melva Truchanas writes about Helen's pivotal role in the campaign to save, and later to restore, Lake Pedder:

Helen was a dynamic inspiration to so many people and organizations over the past 45 years, beginning with the campaign to save Lake Pedder from flooding, in 1967. Her achievements and influence within the Tasmanian conservation movement are so many they cannot be counted.

Helen Gee was a Pedder activist through all this time, becoming the vibrant convener of Pedder 2000, which later became the Lake Pedder Restoration Committee (LPRC). She created, edited and published the Committee's valuable magazine *Reflections*, from 1992 – 2004.

In 1998 Helen travelled to America to represent Pedder 2000 at the International Rivers Network conference on dam removal and de-commissioning, in California. There her motion that Lake Pedder should be freed was passed to a UN Environmental Committee. This visit inspired her to co-ordinate the Living Rivers Festival in Hobart in 2000, which brought the Gyuto Monks to Hobart for the first time to bless Lake Pedder.

In November 2012 Helen was awarded the Lake Pedder Restoration Committee Certificate of Acknowledgement, an expression of sincere appreciation for her long and impassioned service to the cause of the reclamation of Lake Pedder.

TNPA President Robert Campbell writes about Helen's contribution to TNPA, with memories of working with her:

I had the great pleasure of getting to know and work with Helen when she became the campaign officer for the then relatively new TNPA in early 2003, when the organization was still to find its full voice. Helen brought to TNPA her knowledge and decades of campaigning experience. This helped us immeasurably.

One of Helen's first campaigns for the TNPA was helping to organize the "Back to Maria Island Day" to oppose the plan for a large resort and convention centre in the island – a plan later abandoned when secret deals were exposed. I also remember standing together with Helen holding placards outside the offices of Salamanca Realty, fighting against the sale of private property at Canoe Bay, and calling on the Government to purchase the land for inclusion with the Tasman National Park.

However it was Helen's response to the small story in the Mercury the next day which was more memorable. Obviously taken aback by the headline "Greenies Oppose Land Sale", Helen managed to obtain a published correction pointing out that we were not Greenies, but indeed conservationists from the TNPA.

Helen arranged an office for TNPA at the Tasmanian Environment Centre. She edited a number of issues of TNPA News and spoke about the work of TNPA at Buttongrass Ball fundraisers.

Helen's achievements and other work with the TNPA are too numerous to list, but the helping hand she played in the rediscovering of the French garden of the Bruni D'Entrecasteaux expedition at Recherche Bay, and which was critical for the later saving of this area from logging, should be mentioned.

In November 2003 Helen spoke on behalf of the TNPA at the Parks Conference held at Falmouth, and the following are extracts from her speech:

"The social and natural relationships we have with our national parks are based on the historical contract that parks are not marketable goods

Generations have established a principle: the true spirit of national parks is to care, nurture and preserve unique and special areas of our country and pass them on to successive generations with their integrity intact.

The primary purpose of national parks is nature conservation. These places do not belong to just this generation, or any generation. We are custodians for our lifetime. Parks are not to be mined for tourism dollars at the expense of conservation."

Her words still ring true today.

I shall always remember Helen's infectious enthusiasm and her smile. Always happy, she was a delight to work with and together with her integrity and her love for the wild places of Tasmania she was an inspiration to us all. The TNPA thanks her for helping us on our way.

Helen is missed today, and will be missed by us for a long time. However, if you need to find Helen's legacy, take a walk through one of Tasmania's National Parks and look around you. Then smile.

TNPA UPDATE

Overland Track Usage Policy

Walkers on the Overland Track last summer were puzzled by the appearance of several signs along the track reminding walkers that an Overland Track Pass was required during the booking season (which is generally well known) followed by "Day walkers enjoying a short section of the Overland Track are permitted" (another statement of the obvious). Rumours also circulated of one or two incidents in which an officious track ranger had turned back walkers who were undertaking a walk which involved only a part of the Overland Track because they did not have Overland Track Passes.

Questions raised by these incidents led to a document entitled "Overland Track Usage Policy"(OTUP) which appears to have been on the PWS website since August 2012. However, with no links to it from the main Overland Track web page, no media coverage and no consultation, it is hardly surprising that there was no awareness of it amongst the walking community, including the walking clubs.

The OTUP required that walkers using part of the Overland Track walk only one overnight segment, apart from certain exceptions, and that they walk south while on the Overland Track. Following an outcry by the walking clubs the "policy" (it is unlikely that it was ever formally approved as a PWS policy) was replaced (March 2013) by "guidelines" which replaced the requirement to walk south with a request, but maintained the confusing approach of attempting to provide a list of walks which could be undertaken without an Overland Track Pass. This approach can never be complete and publicises some environmentally sensitive routes which are best not publicised.

TNPA's initial letter to PWS produced a response that the guidelines were intended to clarify the existing rules, not to change them, but this depends on one's understanding of what the rules were in the first place. TNPA and most of the bushwalking clubs understood that a permit was required only to walk the whole length of the Overland Track – any walk which did not involve walking the entire length of the Overland Track did not require a permit. The PWS response started from the opposite assumption, namely that a permit has always been required to walk any of the Overland Track (beyond daywalk areas) but there were exceptions such as the use of the Arm River Track to access Mount Ossa – the role of the OTUP/guidelines was to clarify this.

This impasse was ended by the recent discovery of a 2005 PWS "project update" relating to the introduction of the booking system. This clearly states that the fee applies only to those walking the entire Overland Track. This is confirmed by the statement in the Overland Track Draft Recreation Zone Plan 2006 that the "system does not require bookings by those not doing the whole Overland traverse".

TNPA will be writing again to PWS to point out that it was incorrect to claim that the OTUP/guidelines did not change the

Location of Usage Policy sign at Pine Valley track junction, Overland Track. Image courtesy of Nick Sawyer

existing rules and suggest that the current guidelines and signage be removed.

We remain critical of the way in which this issue was handled. The approach was poorly thought-through (was it reviewed even within PWS?) and there was no attempt to consult with affected user groups prior to implementing the policy.

The TNPA is generally supportive of the Overland Track permit system (see *Background* below). If the present system is being compromised (e.g. by permit evasion) in a manner that can be addressed by a "tightening" of the rules, the TNPA is prepared to consider such changes, but they must be preceded by meaningful consultation and appropriately publicised – in no circumstances is it acceptable for someone to commence a walk in good faith only to discover after they have started (encounter with sign or track ranger) that the rules have been changed and it is no longer permitted.

TNPA recommends that PWS reconvene a reference group including representatives of TNPA , Bushwalking Tasmania and other clubs and user groups to review any proposed changes to the rules relating to the Overland Track Pass, and to provide ongoing advice on the management of walking tracks in national parks more generally.

Background

TNPA is supportive of the objectives of the Overland Track permit system namely:

- Minimise environmental degradation;
- Improve walker experience by avoiding overcrowding at overnight nodes; and
- Avoid the construction of additional infrastructure within the national park.
- In TNPA's opinion the permit system has worked well to date and owes much of its success to widespread acceptance by Tasmanian bushwalkers that the permit system, as initially introduced, was necessary and reasonable:
- There was widespread agreement that, at the busiest times, there were serious overcrowding problems on the Overland Track which needed to be addressed for both environmental and social reasons; and
- The permit system was seen as a practical solution which addressed the main problems without imposing unnecessary restrictions or unreasonable cost. In particular:
- It only required a permit/booking during the busiest months of the year and left open the option of walking the track outside the season without restrictions;
- It did not impose a fixed schedule on walkers or require hut/tent site bookings; and
- It did not impose any restrictions on walkers who utilised part of the track during walks to adjacent areas.

The TNPA is concerned that much of this initial goodwill has been lost by the escalating cost of a permit and the extension of the permit season to all except the three winter months which, for most walkers, eliminates the option of walking the track outside the permit season. The attempted imposition of the OTUP/guidelines, and the clumsy manner in which this was done, is another blow to the acceptance of the permit system.

Parks and Wildlife Service. The Overland Track: An Overland Track Project Update. Fact Sheet, May 2005.

Parks and Wildlife Service. Overland Track Draft Recreation Zone Plan, 2006. This has apparently never been finalised. Available on PWS website.

TNPA UPDATE

KEEP THE CAPES WILD CAMPAIGN

In spite of the TNPA's best efforts, and with help from other organisations such as the Tasmanian Conservation Trust and the Peninsula Environment Network, the fully approved (since mid-late 2012) *Three Capes Track* development is ready for construction. How has this come about? – Largely by the government very carefully avoiding addressing the substantive issues raised by the TNPA and others in relation to this development.

The good news however is that the State government has, at least initially, reduced the Track from the original 5 night 'Three Capes' walk that took in both the eastern and western parts of the Tasman Peninsula, and traversed the bulk of the Tasman National Park, to a 3 night walk on the eastern part of the Peninsula only – essentially now a 'Two Capes Track'. The State government however continues to maintain that it is committed to the entire Three Capes Track project.

As with other aspects of the development, the government has been very reluctant to provide any detail on how this reduced 'Two Capes Track' is going to work. Initially the government appeared wedded to running it simply as a chopped off version of the Three Capes Track. This would have required walkers to start the walk in the Port Arthur area and to catch a boat across the bay to the start at Denmans Cove, then stay overnight at the first hut which is less than an hour's walk away. This option is expensive, requires a jetty at Denmans Cove and leaves one wondering what walkers will do for the rest of their day at a hut with no beach and no views and no other walks? We understand however that the government has recently decided to explore the option of a walking track into Denmans Cove from the north. TNPA is also not convinced that a hut is needed near Denmans Cove under this new model.

The PWS also will not say how much they will charge for this reduced experience. Are they perhaps planning to charge the same amount as for the Three Capes Track? In which case – will walkers be prepared to pay so much (now approximately $200) for such a short walk? TNPA understands that the government has undertaken further economic analysis, but there is at this stage no information on the findings from these studies. Nor is there yet any decision on how the private commercial component will work, although the government has foreshadowed that they are likely to be advertising later this year for the private business partner.

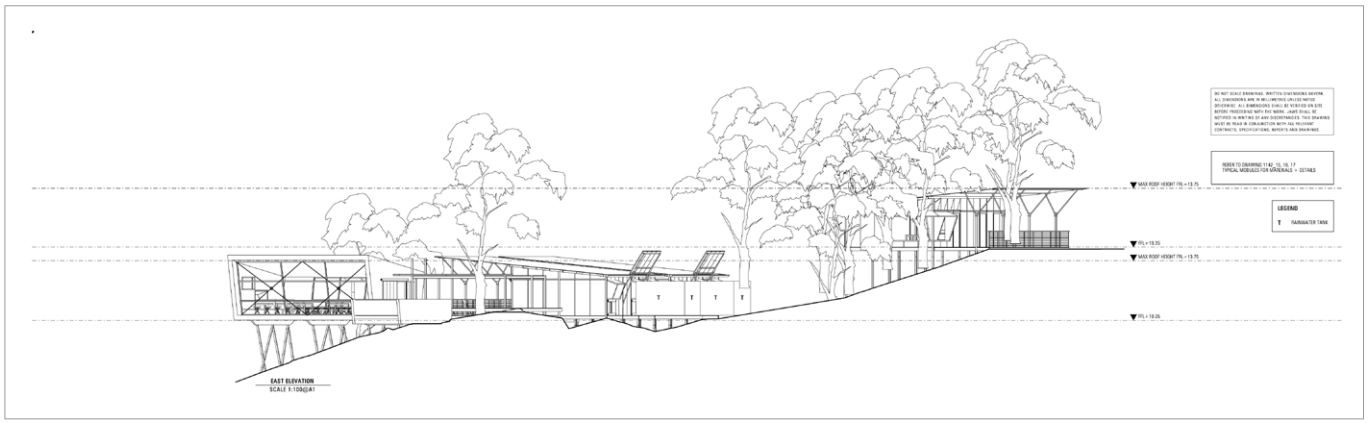
Given the uncertainties, it is to be hoped that the government will release the details of the finalised proposal of Stage 1 (the 'Two Capes' Track) for public review and comment, and not simply start building as yet unapproved new tracks and possibly other infrastructure.

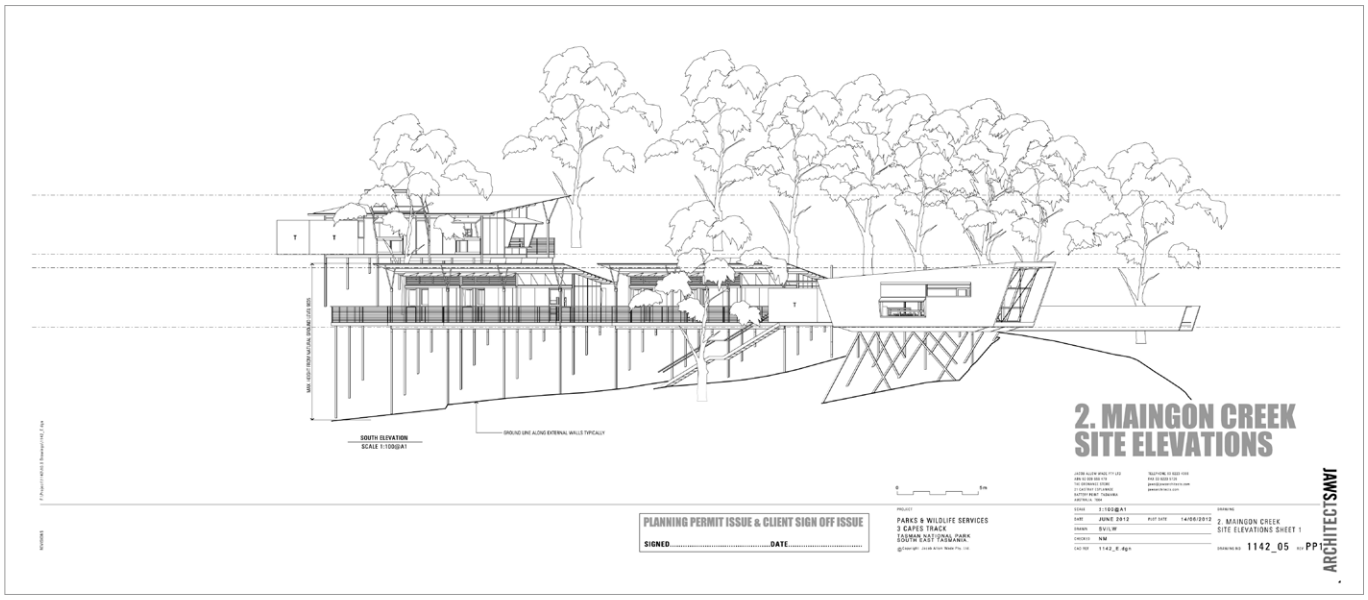
Progress on the Stage 1 'Two Capes Track' development also seems to be slow. Up to this point, the pre-existing Fortescue Bay to Cape Hauy section of track has been upgraded using Federal government funds (– yes a bit sneaky!) (see TNPA News 16), and with, TNPA understands, some further track construction underway. We also understand that the previously proposed track quality is to be reduced to save costs, with significant sections of duck boarding now to be introduced in wetter areas.

There is still an outstanding issue about the extent and nature of **viewing platforms**, especially at Cape Hauy, where one is likely to be required for safety reasons, and other safety railings that TNPA anticipates will be required at places along the track. This infrastructure has not been costed into the proposal and will constitute a significant visual intrusion and other impacts on the national park's values. We understand that the full proposed Stage 1 track is currently being assessed for safety concerns, and that high risk track sections have already been re-routed back from cliff edges in some places. While this is the best approach to limit visual impacts, it does mean there will be even less 'spectacular coastal scenery' to be seen on this so called 'iconic' walk.

The TNPA has also heard rumours that the PWS is considering putting in **4WD tracks** to the overnight nodes because of the high construction and running costs of these due to the need to use helicopters(– super sneaky!). Access by 4WD has not been previously proposed, it is not provided for in the approvals, and it is not provided for in the Park's management plan. Access by 4WD will also have additional (unassessed) impacts on the natural values of the Park, and will destroy the isolated and remote nature of the Three Capes Track, a feature that has been a core part of the branding of the walk.

The TNPA also still have significant concerns about the nature of the proposed **accommodation** at the overnight nodes, which are more appropriately described as 'villages'. The approved accommodation for walkers includes a large bunk-house style building at each node, which appears to have been designed to catch the eye and have a huge visual impact.





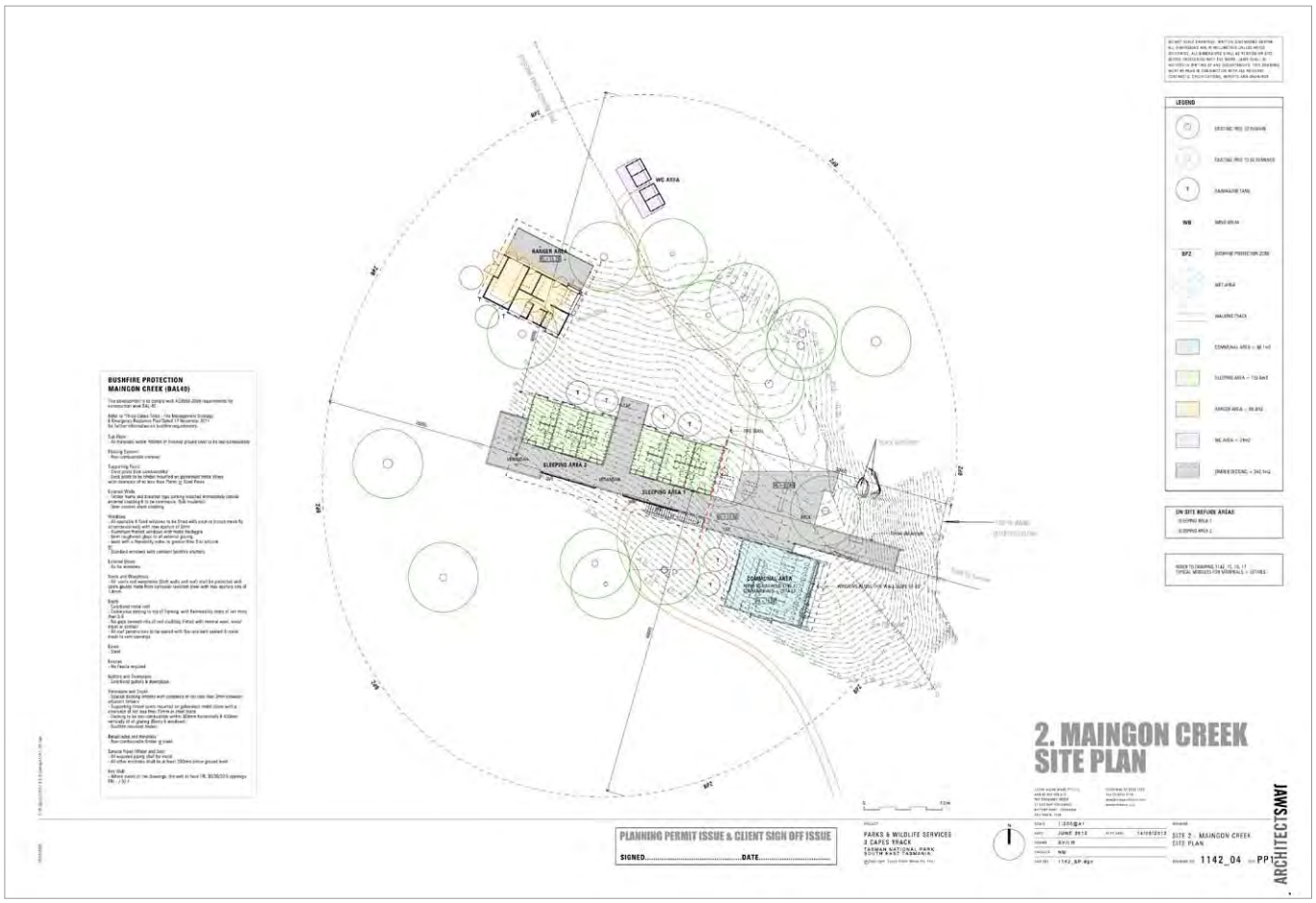


Figure 1: *Proposed accommodation at Maingon Creek (PWS Development Application Three Capes Track Appendix 6 (Overnight Node Concept Plans and Elevations), July 2012). Note that there will be no trees around the buildings given the bushfire hazard minimisation requirements.*

Figure 2: *Pine Valley Hut, Cradle Mountain –Lake St Clair National Park, April 2013. Photo courtesy A. McConnell*

This might be well and good for the pretentious in an urban setting or a commercial resort on private land, but it is the antithesis of what we should be building in national parks. Buildings in national parks, unlike those proposed for the Three Capes Track, should be kept as small as possible, should be as unobtrusive as possible, should blend into the environment and should be easy to maintain and clean.

To give an idea of just how far the proposed accommodation for the Three Capes Track departs from what might be expected and what is suitable for overnight accommodation in a national park, compare Figure 1 (the proposed design for a Three Capes Track bunkhouse) with the recently upgraded hut in Pine Valley, just off the Overland Track (Figure 2). Contrast the large number of buildings, the modern design, the upswept roofs and large areas of glass of the proposed Three Capes Track accommodation with the Pine Valley Hut with its subdued timber finish, its largely low profile (except for the skylights), its well designed verandahs with good shelter and places for cleaning and drying gear and sitting packs (and inside, its efficient use of space through the use of bunk style sleeping platforms for flexible use and numbers).

The Three Capes Track is an extraordinary case of a development for development's sake, with the government shamelessly ignoring the legitimate concerns of the public and its responsibilities for managing national parks, and generally displaying a shocking lack of commonsense.

The TNPA continues to hope that the government will come to its senses before it is too late, and adopt a more environmentally, economically and socially responsible visitor opportunity for the Tasman National Park. Such an approach needs to integrate with the broader Tasman Peninsula, and to use existing facilities to a greater extent, including those at Fortescue Bay and the existing Tasman Coastal Trail, as has been proposed by the TNPA.

Key TNPA letters and submissions regarding the proposed Three Capes Track development and the Keep the Capes Wild campaign can be found on the TNPA website at www.tnpa.asn.au and at www.keepthecapeswild.org.au.

TNPA UPDATE

DRAFT RECREATION ZONE PLAN 2013 Walls of Jerusalem National Park

PWS has recently released a draft recreation zone plan for the Walls of Jerusalem National Park (WoJRZP) for comment. The WoJRZP is available on the PWS website. It emphasises that the most important natural value of this area is the grassy pencil pine forests, and that the greatest threat to these is fire.

Although recreational use of the area has remained relatively constant at around 5,000 visitors per year in recent years, the PWS anticipates increased use by commercial guided walking groups in the near future. School and outdoor education groups are also major users. Even at current use, active deterioration is occurring on some unimproved track sections and campsites despite longstanding camping restrictions in the central Walls and a hardened campsite at Wild Dog Creek since 2003.

The rationale for the WoJRZP for this plan is to protect the area's high conservation values, address the active deterioration that is occurring on some unimproved track sections and campsites and to improve the visitor experience. The main proposals are:

- Creation of a multi-day circuit walk (Wild Dog Creek – Dixons Kingdom – Lake Ball – Lake Adelaide) by upgrading the unformed route from Dixons Kingdom to Lake Ball.
- Promotion of three types of Walls experiences:
  - » Daywalk into the central walls;
  - » Basecamp at Wild Dog Creek; and
  - » Circuit walk described above.
- Expand campsite at Wild Dog Creek, new hardened campsites at Dixons Kingdom and Lake Adelaide.
- Ban camping in the central Walls once these new campsites are operational.
- Immediately introduce a booking system for groups of more than six walkers.
- In the long-term, investigate the introduction of a universal booking system.

The TNPA has serious reservations concerning the proposed establishment of a hardened campsite at Dixons Kingdom and the feasibility of the proposed multi-day circuit walk, but is otherwise generally supportive of the recommendations of the WoJRZP. The TNPA submission is available in full on the TNPA website but the key comments are summarised below.

Fire risk to Pencil Pine forests – Track Rangers

The most important natural value of the area is the stands of large pencil pines with grassy understory which occur in the vicinity of Dixons Kingdom and the central Walls area. These are the finest examples of such forests anywhere. Their preservation must therefore be the overriding imperative of any plan of management for the area.

The greatest threat to this ecosystem is fire. In an area heavily used for recreation, the most likely ignition source is recreational use. Illegal campfires pose the greatest threat, but cigarettes and spilled stove fuel can also start fires. Tree cutting and breakage for firewood for illegal fires is also a potential threat.

The most alarming information in the WoJRZP is the increase in campfires since Track Rangers last worked in the area in 2004 (pages 21-22). This is strong evidence that a visible management presence reduces the frequency of campfires and the associated risk of escape.

PWS must therefore increase the management presence in the area as a matter of urgency – this would also increase the likelihood of a fire being reported immediately, should one occur. TNPA considers that uniformed Rangers or Track Rangers are required, but acknowledges that a volunteer presence coordinated by PWS (as suggested by PWS at briefing on 1 July) would be better than nothing. TNPA is also concerned by comments by PWS staff (at briefing on 1 July) which suggested that funding of a Track Ranger position was dependent on receipt of external funding – this position is sufficiently important that it should be funded from the routine operational budget.

In addition, PWS clearly needs to revive the lapsed, but very successful Minimum Impact Bushwalking educational program.

Expansion of hardened campsite at Wild Dog Creek

The TNPA supports this proposal.

Proposed multi-day circuit walk (Wild Dog Creek – Dixons Kingdom – Lake Ball – Lake Adelaide)

- The proposed multi-day circuit walk currently includes two additional hardened campsites and is not viable without at least one, but the WoJRZP has not established that appropriate sites exist for any additional hardened campsites.
- TNPA does not consider that two additional hardened campsites (Dixons Kingdom and Lake Adelaide) are necessary. The distance from Wild Dog Creek campsite to Dixons Kingdom is only about 3 km (via an easy, high standard track) and Dixons Kingdom to Lake Adelaide is only about 4 km (which will also be an easy, high standard track once the Dixons Kingdom to Lake Ball upgrade is completed).
- TNPA is very doubtful that any appropriate site can be identified in the vicinity of Dixons Kingdom – refer detailed comments below (PWS has not proposed any specific location for the Dixons Kingdom campsite and difficulties of finding a suitable location were acknowledged at briefing on 1 July).
- PWS should identify potential site(s) for additional hardened campsite(s) required for the proposed multi-day circuit walk and undertake a rigorous assessment, including seeking public comment on the assessment of the preferred site(s).
- If PWS cannot identify an acceptable site for an additional hardened campsite, the multi-day circuit walk proposal must be abandoned.

Proposed Dixons Kingdom hardened campsite

The TNPA acknowledges that the area is already a popular campsite. However, the TNPA does not accept that a hardened campsite in this vicinity is essential – refer comments above regarding the proposed multi-day circuit walk.

The WoJRZP correctly identifies the grassy pencil pine forests as the most important natural value of this area and the most extensive of these lies between Damascus Gate and Dixons Kingdom. The establishment of a hardened campsite within this ecosystem would therefore be contrary to the WoJRZP's stated priority to protect this extremely high conservation value. Camping should be totally excluded from this ecosystem.

Dixons Kingdom is arguably the most attractive campsite in the Recreation Zone. It already receives similar use to Wild Dog Creek (advice from PWS at briefing on 1 July) and closure of the remaining campsites in the central Walls (supported by TNPA) is likely to displace additional walkers to this location. i.e. once hardened, it is likely to become the most popular campsite in the Recreation Zone. i.e. a particularly large hardened campsite will be required.

The TNPA is not aware of any suitable location for a large hardened campsite in the vicinity of Dixons Kingdom that does not impact upon the grassy pencil pine forest or other high conservation value ecosystems in the vicinity, to say nothing of its visibility from the surrounding peaks.

Dixons Kingdom to Lake Ball track

The TNPA agrees that this corridor has already suffered substantial trampling damage. The TNPA supports appropriate hardening and reclassification. The resulting circuit walk already receives significant use and its promotion (following hardening) may slightly reduce impacts in the central Walls if it encourages some walkers to undertake a circuit via Lake Adelaide rather than spending additional time in the central Walls. Consideration should be given to the potentially high visual impact of a hardened track in this area.

Group booking system

Given the acknowledged environmental and social impacts of large groups, the TNPA supports, in principle, the immediate introduction of a "booking system for large groups". This is assumed to mean that all groups of 7 or more (school/outdoor education, commercial, walking club or private) may only camp within the recreation zone at designated group campsites (currently only at Wild Dog Creek) which must be booked in advance. However, PWS must clarify this. This could be a "win-win" situation if a booking guaranteed the availability of a campsite capable of accommodating the entire group.

Investigation of universal booking system

The TNPA considers that the booking system for the popular Overland Track has worked reasonably well and has been accepted by most walkers. TNPA would first like to see how the group booking system (together with the other management measures to be introduced) helps alleviate the present problems before seeing a booking system considered for all walkers. If limits are needed to curb ongoing non-sustainable impacts then the TNPA would consider the need for a more broadly based booking system in the longer term. TNPA notes that a booking system will be far more challenging to implement for an area like the Walls with multiple entry points and many possible itineraries than for the "linear" Overland Track.

Commercial operations – group size

PWS staff (at briefing on 1 July) acknowledged that the group size limits for particular track classes (as defined in the World Heritage Area Walking Track Management Strategy) may not have been made clear to commercial operators, which may have resulted in commercial groups using T3 and T4 Tracks and Routes with group sizes in excess of the eight recommended in the Track Classification Scheme. There is no excuse for this and commercial operators should be advised immediately that size limits will be enforced during the 2013-14 walking season. The TNPA also expects that the group size limits will be enforced for non-commercial groups. TNPA would accept an exception being made to permit groups of 13 using the Dixons Kingdom to Lake Ball T4 until this is upgraded to T2 standard, but an annual number limit should be placed on this.

TNPA UPDATE

Developing Tourism on Maria Island

About 10 years ago, the TNPA ran its *Not For Sale* campaign to protect the natural and cultural values of Maria Island – a National Park – from being 'sold off' to tourism developers. The issue at the time was an open ended expression of interest for tourist development put out by the Parks & Wildlife Service, which did not even mention the significant convict heritage in the Darlington area, now part of Australia's serial *Convict Site World Heritage Area*. The TNPA campaign was successful and no major new commercial developments occurred.

More recently the Parks & Wildlife Service has taken the much more responsible approach of commissioning a *Maria Island Ecotourism Feasibility Development Study*. This is being undertaken by consulting company, TRC Tourism, and has included public consultation. Although this might have been more appropriately termed a 'Tourism Development Study', the TNPA was extremely pleased to see the Parks & Wildlife Service take this much more responsible planning approach. It is heartening to see a previously ad hoc approach to tourism development being replaced by a planned approach.

In June 2013, TRC Tourism released its *Maria Island Ecotourism Feasibility Development Study Draft Report* for public comment. This draft report is a mixed document, with some excellent background research on tourism, some good, cautious ideas for environmentally sustainable tourism, and some well detailed matters on one hand, but with some significant data gaps and a number of proposals which have insufficient detail or are poorly justified on the other.

The Draft Report is very optimistic about the tourism potential of Maria Island, but somewhat superficial when it comes to presenting a reasoned argument for 'ecotourism' development for Maria Island, a national park with considerable natural and cultural values, and World Heritage convict heritage in the Darlington precinct.

In essence the Draft Report acknowledges the ferry service as the key issue for tourism development on Maria Island, and also sees accommodation, the limited range of activities and limited branded marketing as the other major issues. A new jetty at Darlington and an improved ferry service, run with government support, are key recommendations. In terms of new activities, the report has largely focused on individual and group activities that do not require significant new infrastructure, for example increased use of the marine environment through boat trips (sea kayaking and power boat trips to the south end of the Island), increased use of scenic values such as the Painted Cliffs, and more use of the island generally through walking and cycling (although it is not clear whether new tracks are required for the increased cycling). The report is also unclear on commercial camping based activities such as those already provided by the Maria Island Walk.

In relation to accommodation, it is recommended to upgrade bed nights through a mix of retaining camping (it is unclear if the amount of camping in the Darlington area will stay the same or be decreased), refurbishing some of the heritage cottages and rebuilding rooms at the Coffee Palace (all acceptable under the Conservation Management Plan if done appropriately), upgrading the Penitentiary accommodation, a nature/adventure lodge based around Encampment Cove, and provision of a number of standing camps elsewhere on the Island to support mountain biking and sea kayaking.

The TNPA does not necessarily disagree with the key conclusions of the Draft Report, but it does have concerns about a number of recommendations and also some major concerns with the way the conclusions have been arrived at, and the lack of detail in many areas. Specific concerns include:

- A lack of acknowledgement generally that the context for the development is a national park with an imperative and a priority to manage and protect the Park's natural and cultural values.
- Very limited explicit natural and cultural environmental impact assessment.
- Very little regard for the provisions of the Park Management Plan, in particular its zoning, which places significant constraints on some of the proposals for broader use of the Island.
- The apparent opening up of the Natural Zone for activities such as walking, bicycle riding and camping, contrary to the zone's purpose and objectives.
- No real comparative assessment of the ecotourism and general tourism attractiveness of Maria Island versus that of other natural areas elsewhere in Tasmania, although heavily promoting the potential of Maria island.
- A flawed assumption (& rationale for development) that tourism to the island is necessary to meet the ongoing costs of managing the heritage, as well as very high proposed fee increases (mostly a 50% to 100% increase on present costs).
- An unrealistic reliance on the Parks & Wildlife Service, a currently extremely under-resourced agency, to make many

of the necessary changes happen and to manage the ferry and much of the accommodation.

- The focus on developing higher end of the market accommodation at the expense, in some cases, of the low cost accommodation (ie, the Penitentiary and camping) that is the hallmark and a key attraction of Maria Island to Tasmanians.
- A recommendation for a nature/adventure lodge at Encampment Cove, without any detail, potentially leading to major new infrastructure in the Park for no clear purpose.
- The proposal for a new jetty at the south end of the island, not discussed in any detail.
- The promotion of 'scenic flights', which would detract from the peace and quiet and feeling of isolation, and may also be a threat to nesting eagles.
- The seasonality of opportunity, especially given the emphasis on camping based accommodation and outdoor recreation, and issues such as water supply and seasonal strong winds, is not addressed.

Given our concerns, the TNPA believes the *Ecotourism Feasibility Development Study* needs to be significantly revised to deal with the above issues. It is critical, if the natural and cultural values of Maria Island National Park are to be conserved, that the status of the Island as a National Park with World Heritage cultural elements is at the forefront of the discussion.

Maria Island has a lot to offer without over-promotion. It is these existing values, recognised in the Management Plan, which should be seen as the core attributes for attracting visitors to the Island.

The TNPA submission on the Maria Island Ecotourism Feasibility Development Study Draft Report June 2013 can be found on the TNPA website at www.tnpa.asn.au.

TNPA UPDATE

Wellington to Wilderness long distance trail

Several years ago Bob Brown proposed a long distance walking track from the Wellington Range to the World Heritage Area through the then threatened forests in between. More recently (as part of a raft of potential projects for funding with the reconstruction monies available from the Forestry Intergovernmental Agreement) this proposal was revised to a Mount Wellington to the Styx valley long distance walk.

In 2012, funding was provided to the Wellington Park Management Trust (WPMT) to undertake a feasibility study of this proposal. As part of this, the WPMT set up a reference group (on which TNPA was represented) to examine the proposal. Aspects that particularly concerned TNPA were:

- this long distance track was not being considered as part of a broader strategic examination of long distance walking track opportunities in Tasmania;
- the high potential impacts on the natural and cultural values of Wellington Park; and
- the potential for the track (possibly including access for mountain bikes) to be extended to the Snowy Range within the World Heritage Area.

Last year the WPMT engaged consultants to undertake a feasibility study for a multi-day recreation track for mountain bikers, horse riders and walkers. Two key points identified in the preliminary assessment (available on WPMT website) were:

- little identified demand for a linear recreation track along this route (walking or cycling) and plenty of more attractive long distance walks in Tasmania; and
- high demand from mountain bikers and horse riders for loop tracks providing part-day and day ride opportunities.

At the final meeting of the reference group in May, no support was expressed for the Snowy Range option and most discussion centred on the possibility of additional day-walk opportunities in the Wellington Range and loop tracks for mountain bikers although no obvious candidates for development were identified. The horse riders were interested in different loop tracks and making better use of the existing Tasmanian Trail.

At time of writing the Draft Feasibility Study is now overdue for release for public comment.

STOP PRESS

A new 'Parks Reserves Authority' for Tasmania

The establishment of a new *Parks and Reserves Authority* has just been announced by the Minister for Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment, Brian Wightman. TNPA, together with the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, attended a briefing by the Secretary for DPIPWE on the proposed new authority and has since spoken to the PWS about the proposed change.

In essence the government is proposing "a new statutory parks and reserves authority within the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) bringing together responsibility for management of national parks, reserves, crown land and carbon in reserves."[1]

Key elements are that:

- the new Parks and Reserves Authority will be a statutory authority,
- be made up of a new 5 member Parks and Reserves Board (replacing the National Parks & Wildlife Advisory Council) and a Chief Executive Officer (understood to be the new replacement of the position of Director PWS),
- the Board will be skills-based and provide the Minister with strategic advice on planning and management of reserves,
- the Authority will be responsible for advice on strategy and planning, and for the operational management of Parks and other reserved land.

According to preliminary information from the government, the Minister will be "the managing authority for all Parks and other Reserved land unless another entity is made a reserve manager by Order of the Governor" and the Minister "will have a power to issue Statements of Expectations to the Authority with respect to the Parks and Reserves Strategic Plan and Management Plans". A 'Statement of Expectations' in effect allows the Minister to tell the Authority exactly what he wants them to do, and when. This has significant implications for what should be the independence of a statutory authority. The Minister in effect will retain all his current powers.

The Board will be skills based, "collectively having knowledge and experience in governance, environmental conservation, resource management, fire management, carbon management, cultural and Aboriginal heritage, recreation and tourism." Somewhat of a tall order for a five member Board, in the TNPA's opinion.

Beyond that there is no detail.

TNPA understands that the government's timetable is to have the new Authority in place in the next 2-5 months. As the establishment of the new Authority will require the Nature Conservation Act 2002 (one of the two Acts that govern the management of Tasmania's reserved land) to be amended, it is difficult to see how this new Authority can occur in the proposed time frame, and why it is being introduced with such haste.

It is unclear what is driving the move to a new Authority. Neither it, nor any amendments to the PWS legislation, are required as a result of the recent Forests Agreement Act, although clearly this has been a catalyst for the change. Given there is no imperative for structural change to the PWS, it is disappointing to see such significant change being pushed through with no discussion, no reflection, and such an ambitious time frame – surely a recipe for a poor outcome.

The TNPA would like a lot more detail on the proposed changes. We are concerned, given the very limited amount of information about the new Authority and the complete absence of information about what happens below the board level, that this is a case of the government making policy on the run.

The Minister claims that the proposed new Authority will be a much better approach to managing Tasmania's world class reserve system[2] – but we haven't seen any data or argument to demonstrate that this will be the case. TNPA also has serious reservations about a five member Board to cover reserves, carbon and climate change (and potentially anything else environmental that is outside the scope of the EPA) – areas that go significantly beyond 'Parks and Reserves', but curiously not included in the Authority's name. The unseemly haste with which the Authority is being set up is also of concern given that what the full Authority will look like, including how it will integrate the PWS, is not yet established.

The proposal is a significant change in how Tasmania's Parks and Reserves are run. Without more detail, it could be construed as a way of bundling a number of the government's environmental responsibilities, in effect watering down the government's performance in these areas. It is also potentially a mechanism to save the government money on environmental management, without it being as obvious as an 'amalgamation' or cuts to various agencies.

The TNPA would like to be convinced that this new Authority is in the best interests of environmental management in Tasmania, and believe the government has a duty to its constituents to demonstrate that this new Authority will, and can, do what is being claimed, and will have sufficient independence, resourcing and expertise to function effectively.

Therefore, BEFORE setting up this new Authority, TNPA would like to see the government set out clearly, preferably in a report, its arguments for a new Authority and to provide Tasmanians with details on how existing agencies will be used or incorporated, how the Board will work and the resourcing and environmental implications of this. We also suggest that some consultation on this might be in order.

Shortchanging the Tasmanian environment, in particular its outstanding reserve system, is not acceptable.

[1] 'Information on the Proposed Parks and Reserves Authority' Information Sheet, issued by the Tasmanian Government, July 2013.

[2] 'The future management of Tasmania's world class reserve system will be guided by a new authority to match its status' Media Release, Hon B. Wightman 10 July 2913.

TNPA PROFILE

Chia-Chin Amy Lin

Currently providing TNPA's secretariat service

I have been a member of the TNPA since 2009 and took the role of secretariat in June 2013. Originally from Taiwan, I came to Tasmania as a backpacker who planned to spend 2 months here in 2004. During my travel, I fell in love with Tasmania's natural environment and the friendly, kind and passionate people, and decided to stay and do a Masters in Environmental Planning. I then did a PhD that explored sense of place, tourism impacts, and protected areas. The Three Capes Track proposal in the Tasman National Park and the eco-lodge development at East Cockle Creek in the Southwest National Park were my case studies.

I met my partner who took me bushwalking, introduced me to Australian culture and inspired me in so many ways. The Central Plateau is my favourite place where we can spend a few days without seeing anyone or any infrastructure. The numerous glacial tarns, pencil pines and spacious grassy plains are simply breathtaking. I am very grateful for being able to enjoy these places and therefore want to contribute to their conservation. As a University Associate and associate lecturer of the University of Tasmania since 2012, I teach environmental management as a part of the Offshore Academic Program in Shanghai Ocean University in China, with a hope that I can inspire more people to protect the environment. I also helped Environment Tasmania to develop its eco-tourism policy and I have now taken the opportunity to provide secretariat service for the TNPA.

TNPA welcomes Amy to this role.

Tasmanian National Parks Association Inc

Patron: Peter Cundall

TNPA Management Committee
President: Robert Campbell
Vice Presidents: Anne McConnell & Chris Bell
Treasurer: Patsy Jones
Secretary: Nick Sawyer
Public Officer: Catharine Errey

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Meetings
Management Committee meetings are usually held one Monday each month at 5:30 pm. Members and supporters are welcome. Meeting dates and venue will be advertised in each TNPA Communique or please check with the Secretariat.

Have your say...

ABC Local Radio: Mornings - Leon Compton
tasmornings@your.abc.net.au or 1300 222 936

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TNPA News

TNPA News is published twice a year. It aims to provide informative articles on issues related to national parks and other reserves, as well as updates on TNPA activities and campaigns. The views expressed in TNPA News are not necessarily those of the TNPA Inc. For this issue many thanks to Robert Campbell, Anne McConnell, Nick Sawyer, Paul Smith, Alice Graham, Bob Graham and Melva Truchanas. Original articles in TNPA News may be reproduced , but please acknowledge the author and the source. Contributions for TNPA News No. 18 are welcomed (deadline mid Dec 2013). Please send contributions to admin@tnpa.asn.au (attention: TNPA News editor).

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