TNPA NEWS

TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION INC

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South Coast at sunrise, Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

Image credit: Michael Roberts

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THANK YOU

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"To protect, present and manage in concert with the community, Tasmania's unique and outstanding reserve system for all people, for all time." *Vision statement of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service*

From the President's Pen

I was fortunate to spend my childhood in Tasmania and consider myself privileged to be living here now. But for many years I lived interstate and also spent some time travelling and living overseas. Being away from Tasmania provides a perspective on just how pristine and precious Tasmania is, by comparison with most of the rest of the world. Here in Tasmania we still have places and landscapes, rivers and lakes, flora and fauna, that have not been destroyed or modified by the modern way of life. This is rare indeed on this planet – in most places where humans live, all traces of original nature are at best a distant memory and in many instances were lost centuries, if not millennia, ago.

Which, of course, is the principal reason why people from all over the world visit Tasmania. And which is what our tourism industry is trying to capitalise on.

But we cannot have it both ways. If we promote Tasmania's unspoiled nature and then spoil it by constructing roads, buildings etc within it, we have destroyed this precious heritage, recognised as World Heritage. This was made very clear to me by a European visitor whom I met on a walking trip. He lives in Belgium, a built-up country with a high population density, and chose to come to Tasmania precisely because here you can be immersed in nature with no cars, overflights or commercial tourist accommodation – he emphasised that it was those things that he came here to get away from.

It us up to us who live here now to stand up for what is unique and precious about this island – and indeed this is the brief of the Tasmanian National Parks Association.

Tasmania's greatest assets are its national parks and reserves and it is a no-brainer that for these to be properly cared for we need a Parks Service that is adequately resourced to carry out its role as Parks manager.

In this issue of TNPA News we feature an excellent article by Cathie Plowman on the Mole Creek Karst National Park. Under the section entitled "Some Current Issues" Cathie talks about the lack of resources that the PWS has for long-term planning for the protection and management of the Park, the focus instead being on coping with ever-increasing visitor numbers.

The same could be said for all national parks in Tasmania that are currently 'popular' with tourists. And those that are not suffer from even less resource allocation.

We know that already the quality of visitor experience in places such as Freycinet is being diminished by the sheer numbers of tourists, one effect of which is that there are sometimes no car parking spaces for people wishing to do the walk to the 'iconic' Freycinet lookout.

There are two issues here:

1. The lack of long-term planning for the future of tourism in Tasmania. Without any considered debate the government, supported by the "big end" of the tourism industry, is calling for the "unlocking" of Tasmania's national parks. What is needed is consensus on what the future of tourism would look like. **The focus needs to be on maintaining and enhancing the quality of the visitor experience rather than on encouraging (or just coping with) an ever-increasing quantity of visitors. Planning needs to be done in the light of protecting and maintaining what are recognised as Tasmania's strengths i.e. wilderness, naturalness, clean air, quiet and stillness - and lack of crowds.**
2. The under-resourcing of the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Late in 2016 the Hobart Mercury reported on the audit of Tasmania's Parks and Wildlife Service by the Auditor-General, Rod Whitehead:

> *Visitor safety and pest and disease control in Tasmania's National Parks have been compromised by insufficient funding and out-of-date management plans, according to a damning report.*

The article continues:

> *Mr Whitehead said management plans were outdated, there were no systematic processes to identify threats and the threats were not routinely monitored or managed.*
>
> *PWS had identified and documented threats, but some documents were more than 10 years out of date, he said. (The Mercury 15 Nov 2016)*

Jen Brown's article in this issue of TNPA News tells a story of a wild and beautiful part of Tasmania, the South Coast, suffering serious degradation through lack of resources for fixing up basic infrastructure:

> *The deep muddy tracks are now so wide in places they look like four-wheel-drive roads. You don't have to be unlucky to stumble across a half-buried dump site not far off the track, from someone's failed bush toilet mission. Human influence on the South Coast is a real and serious management problem already.*

The natural environment suffers and so does the visitor experience. Our government needs to get its priorities in order.

And we, the people who live here, need to make sure that they do.

By Catharine Errey
President, Tasmanian National Parks Association

by Nick Sawyer

Major changes to planning in Tasmania facilitate tourist developments within national parks

The State Government is in the midst of downgrading Tasmania's once exemplary planning system with the aim of facilitating development.

Most attention has focussed on the introduction of the Tasmanian (State-wide) Planning Scheme, and its effects on urban development, but it is accompanied by two other measures which have attracted less attention – indirect changes to development assessment on reserved land by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) and the foreshadowed introduction of Major Projects legislation.

All three in conjunction have major implications for development approval in Tasmania, including on reserved land. Major developments such as tourist resorts within national parks will soon be able to be approved without the public having any right to comment on proposals or to appeal the decision. Developments could even be approved without the public being aware of them.

1. Tasmanian (State-wide) Planning Scheme

The legislative changes to establish the Tasmanian Planning Scheme were passed by State parliament in 2015 but approval of Local Provisions Schedules (to be prepared by individual Councils) is required before the new scheme can fully take effect – this is likely later in 2017.

One change has major implications for the approval of developments on reserved land. These have previously been discretionary (i.e. subject to consideration by council) but once the Tasmanian Planning Scheme is fully operational, a development on reserved land which has received the necessary approvals from the PWS (see below) will be a permitted use. i.e. the proposal will not be advertised and there will be no opportunity for public comment or appeal. This represents a huge loss of transparency because previously this provided the only mandatory requirement for public comment and the only possibility for appeal.

Statutory process: A process which is defined in law – which means it can be subject to legal challenge if not followed exactly.

EOI: an Expression of Interest submitted in response to the Tasmanian Government's advertising of Tourism investment opportunities in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, National Parks and Reserves.

Planning Approval: The legally binding approval that allows a proposed development to proceed.

Discretionary Use: If a proposed development is a discretionary use, Council may approve it (i.e. Council exercises its discretion). The law requires that Council advertise the proposal for comment and provides the right to appeal the approval.

Permitted Use: If a proposed development is a permitted use, Council must approve it – the proposal will not be advertised and there will be no opportunity for public comment or appeal.

Assessment: The evaluation of a development proposal against legal requirements including the planning scheme or management plan (for developments in national parks) in order to decide whether to grant planning approval. Note that the terms "assessment process" and "approval process" are often used interchangeably. This is misleading – an assessment process does not necessarily lead to an approval – it can result in a refusal.

Public comment: The assessment process includes the opportunity for members of the public to make formal written comment on the proposed development. The assessment documentation should include a considered response to each comment and may include recommendations to modify the proposal to address concerns raised.

Appeal: The legal right to formally challenge a planning approval in the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal.

2. Assessment of Developments on Reserved Land

Tasmania has never had a statutory (defined in legislation) process for the assessment of developments in national parks but this did not matter much in the 1990s because there was broad agreement that national parks were off-limits for development. In 2017 the absence of such a process is a recipe for disaster. The State Government's policy of "unlocking" Tasmania's national parks for developers has left our parks at risk of development proposals which may be approved with no guarantee of public scrutiny and no opportunity for legal challenges.

The National Parks legislation requires only that a major development within a national park receives approval from the land manager, the PWS. There is no requirement for any public involvement in the decision. A few national park management plans still contain a requirement that the assessment of a development requires public consultation but the omission of such a requirement from the new 2016 management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) is a huge step backwards from the recently superseded 1999 plan. In conjunction with the loss of any assessment by local government under the new state-wide planning scheme this leaves Tasmania's major national parks without any requirement for public scrutiny of development proposals.

The PWS approval may be informed by the PWS's inadequate Reserve Activity Assessment (RAA). This provides for public notification and comment only on the most major proposals (as determined by the PWS). There is no requirement for any aspect of the assessment to be made public and it is not a statutory process (it is defined only by an internal PWS policy document) so there is not even any legal requirement to undertake a RAA and it cannot provide any possibility of appeal or legal challenge.

The main mechanism for attracting development proposals on reserved land has become the State Government's call for Expressions of Interest (EoI) in "tourism investment opportunities". The "assessment" of these proposals can be summarised as ensuring that all existing legal requirements are met. The main

criteria are the extremely broad objectives of the relevant reserve class and the purposes of reservation defined in legislation. A proposal is also checked for compliance with any existing management plan, but amendments to the management plan may be proposed if it is considered that the proposal "has merit" despite being contrary to current restrictions (this has already occurred with Narawntapu, Freycinet and Tasman National Parks). A RAA may be conducted but this has major limitations – see above.

Federal Government oversight of the TWWHA provides little reassurance, not only because of the current government's lack of commitment to environmental protection but also because it is restricted to considering only impacts on world heritage values. These are so broad that they are unlikely to be significantly impacted by any single tourism development. Note that wilderness is not explicitly listed as a world heritage value which will make it hard to argue for consideration of impacts on wilderness character despite the decision of the World Heritage Committee urging "recognition of wilderness character of the property as one of its key values and as being fundamental for its management".

3. Major Projects legislation

This has been foreshadowed by the State Government and is expected to be introduced into State parliament early in 2017. It is expected to remove from Councils (or PWS if on reserved land) the responsibility for assessment of multi-million dollar projects which are not large enough to meet the criteria for assessment as Projects of State Significance (such as the Pulp Mill).

The Major Projects legislation is the likely mechanism for assessing the Cradle Cable Car (Visitor Centre to Dove Lake) proposal and the Mount Wellington Cable Car, if this ever progresses to a formal proposal.

Will these changes actually help developers?

The stated aim of these changes is to facilitate development and indeed they may speed-up approvals, but a development without a social licence will operate at a major disadvantage, and this is particularly apparent where there is a high degree of public interest, such as within national parks. The most credible route to a social licence is to participate in a rigorous planning process which includes a considered response to public criticism. Developers rarely appreciate that such participation, often derided as time-wasting "red tape", gives them a credibility that they otherwise lack. Stinting on it is a recipe for protests and lingering resentment, not to mention legal challenges which have the potential to delay an approval for far longer than dealing with public concerns through the mechanisms available within the planning system.

The future

The absence of a thorough process for the assessment of developments on reserved land can only be addressed by changes to Tasmanian legislation. This needs to acknowledge that a development in a national park does not only affect the natural values but also affects important matters such as the experience of other visitors (e.g. a development which involves the use of helicopters), and that this is beyond the scope of any currently required assessment. This legislative change would provide a separate, statutory (legally binding) process for the assessment of development proposals in national parks which would consider the effect of the proposal on all the values of the park and guarantee an opportunity for public comment and right of appeal.

Rim pool terraces, Mole Creek Karst National Park *image credit: Ross Anderson*

by Cathie Plowman

An introduction to the Mole Creek Karst National Park

I'm walking up a stream. Water droplets on smooth rocks glisten in the beam of my headlight. Far above me are the tiny blue lights of glow-worms. The stream passage meanders smoothly and gently, serpent-like, not just beside me, but for 10 metres or more above me; smoothed water-worn rock. And then I realise again, as I have several times before when in this cave: the cave is art. And the artist's brushes are water and time. Lots of time.

Today, my cave is calm and serene, the water low around my gumboots. But it's not always like this. Water has pulsated and ravaged through here. The floods of last winter brought huge amounts of water, rocks and vegetation through the cave and I can see some of the effects today. I'm not here in times like this, keeping safely away until the turbulence has subsided.

The cave I'm in is part of the extensive Marakoopa system, the popular show cave, Marakoopa Cave, being a small but significant part of an elaborate karst system covering 789 hectares on the slopes of Western Bluff, just one of several karst systems that make up the Mole Creek Karst National Park.

Karst is a word and a world not widely understood

In simple terms, the word karst describes the type of country that limestone caves are found in.

In more detailed terms, the word karst is used to describe landscapes that are developed principally by chemical processes rather than physical processes. The chemical process is the solution of limestone, or other

soluble rocks, by the acidic effects of underground water. Most karst areas are formed in limestone rock, but other less common soluble rocks include dolomite and gypsum, amongst others. The Hastings Caves in southern Tasmania are formed in dolomite. The Mole Creek karst is formed in limestone.

While there is academic debate on the exact origin of the word karst, it is either German or Slovene/German in origin and was given to the cave-rich plateau in western Slovenia in the late 1800s. Political borders have changed since that time and part of this area is now in Italy.

Limestone caves are the best-known part of karst landscapes but sinkholes, disappearing and reappearing streams and particular surface features, are typical features of karst landscapes.

Australia's largest karst area is the arid Nullarbor Plain, an uplifted ancient seabed composed of soft limestone and containing many caves, underground lakes and other karst features, including very significant palaeontological and archaeological resources.

Water and karst go hand-in-hand.

Water is integral to the development of karst landscapes. This is a dynamic, ongoing process with complex relationships between climate, soils, vegetation and rock. Karst landscapes don't form and then 'sit still'. Their development is continuous and karst areas are intertwined with their water catchment and the processes within it. Land clearing, rubbish dumping, agricultural practices, sewerage management and water quality are just a few of the variables that affect karst. As lengthy time processes are involved in karst development, impacts of water quality change on karst may not be seen or understood for some time.

The Mole Creek Karst National Park

The national park was proclaimed in September 1996. The then State minister responsible for national parks, Mrs Denise Swan, officially opened the national park in December that year. On a Saturday morning, with sunshine sparkling through the trees outside Marakoopa Cave, she was assisted in a ribbon-cutting event by long-serving ranger Chester Shaw and a group of students from the Mole Creek Primary School.

The national park is not a contiguous area of land. In 1996 it consisted of 11 separate parcels of land that were already proclaimed as State reserves or unallocated Crown Land. Reservation of these parcels of land dated back to as early as 1906 (1).

But, while the boundaries of the 1996 national park included cave entrances, cave and karst management was somewhat 'hotch-potch'. Caves were on a mix of land tenures while water catchments, integral to cave ecosystems, were generally outside of reserved land. While these are still issues today, there has been ongoing progress in integrated land and water management. There have also been some significant additions to the national park over the past 20 years.

Changes to land tenure and ongoing policy changes, often associated with political processes, are complex and lengthy. However, there are three processes that have had very significant benefits for the management of karst areas at Mole Creek.

i) Joint Management Protocol for the Mill Creek–Kansas Creek Catchment

The Mill Creek and Kansas Creek catchments are on the north-western end of Western Bluff. Here areas of State forest are underlain by limestone and caves: State forest is in water catchment of caves in the MCKNP and some caves lie across two tenures: land managed by Forestry Tasmania and by the Parks and Wildlife Service.

The protocol is an appendix to the Mole Creek Karst National Park and Conservation Area Management Plan 2004 to jointly manage a wide range of issues associated with caves and karst including, but not limited to, catchment management, public access and fire (2).

ii) The aftermath of the 2004 federal election

A Tasmanian highlight of the 2004 election campaign included a trade union- organised rally of forestry workers in the City Park, Launceston, where Prime Minister John Howard outlined his forestry policy.

The re-election of the Liberal-National Party government led to the Mole Creek Karst Forest Programme. The programme was managed by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy and funds were provided for land owners to voluntarily protect forests in karst areas. The

proceeding decade or so had seen increased regulations concerning private land management in karst areas. Some landowners had become aggrieved due to regulations limiting tree-clearing and development of their land.

Under the programme over 500 hectares of significant karst was protected (3), by:

- buying the land and incorporating it into the Mole Creek Karst National Park;
- placing covenants on private land and paying compensation to the owners; and
- in two cases, by the purchase of properties and placement of covenants before offering the properties on the market for resale. One of these properties has subsequently sold, while the other is still available for sale via the Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

The covenants protect specified conservation values. They are perpetual and cannot be revoked without the approval of the Tasmanian parliament.

iii) The Tasmanian Forest Agreement

Forest issues had seen bitter conflicts, civil unrest and community division in Tasmania for several decades. The era of federal Labor governments in 2010-2013 saw the momentous negotiations between the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania (FIAT), conservation groups and the Construction, Forestry, Mining, and Energy Union (CFMEU) to bring about a forest peace plan. The efforts of all involved are to be applauded.

Part of the final agreement between the negotiating parties led to the 2013 increase in the size of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) by 170,000 hectares (4). The additional areas included parts of existing national parks, new reserves, areas of State forest and some privately-owned conservation areas.

Australia's submission to UNESCO (to extend the TWWHA) made numerous references to caves and karst which were cited outstanding universal value against the World Heritage criteria:

- Criterion vii: Contains superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; and
- Criterion viii: be outstanding examples representing major stages of the Earth's history, including the record of life, significant ongoing

Cavers at Mole Creek *image credit: Cathie Plowman*

Mole Creek Karst National Park *image credit: Ross Anderson*

> geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features. (5)

The 2013 extension of the TWWHA means that most of the Mole Creek Karst National Park (the exception being the Wet Cave/Honeycomb Cave block) is now World Heritage. This provides increased and significant protection for caves that are managed under joint tenure between the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) and Forestry Tasmania.

A long history of reservation and tourism

The opening of the 'new' national park in 1996 was another phase in a long history of conservation of the caves, a history that is coupled with people visiting the caves to experience their beauty and gain joy and inspiration from them.

In his 2015 book *Wonderstruck*, Tasmanian cave researcher and author Dr Nic Haygarth explores many facets of the exploration and enjoyment of Tasmania's caves including: the development of cave tourism in the Mole Creek area dating back before the 1850s, the increase in cave tourism with the 1871 opening of Tasmania's first passenger railway between Launceston and Deloraine, and the early conservation efforts of the Deloraine Council in establishing a cave reserve as early as 1879.

The riches of King Solomon and more

People enjoy caves because they are beautiful and for many that is reason enough that the caves be protected in a national park. The best-known caves are Marakoopa and King Solomons.

With a large cathedral-like cavern, wide 'walls' of glistening flowstone, towering calcite formations, tiny helictites growing in varying directions, the blue lights of tiny glow-worms and two streams that continue to gradually re-shape the cave, even though time seems to stand still here, Marakoopa Cave embodies the reported Aboriginal meaning of its name: beautiful or handsome. Cave scientist Andy Spate has described Marakoopa as 'arguably Australia's greatest show cave' (6). Besides so much visual beauty, Marakoopa lets us see today the effects of glacial melting 10,000 years ago.

King Solomons Temple is the largest chamber of a cave rich with lavish calcite speleothems. Artistically designed lighting displays the cave's features, allowing visitors to wander in semi-darkness and appreciate the massive stalactites, columns and dazzling calcite crystals that have inspired visitors to the cave since it opened for tourism in 1908. The entry chamber in King Solomons is named for Evelyn Temple (ET) Emmett who was the first director of the Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau and a founding member of the Hobart Walking Club.

Protected from ready access by gates and the requirement for entry permits are a number of extraordinary beautiful caves that include Genghis Khan, Kubla Khan and Croesus. Over 500 cave entrances have been documented in the Mole Creek area, many of these on private land. As many caves included in this database have multiple entrances, it does not mean 500 individual caves—some are very small.

The caverns and their attractive formations are but the start of things to look for in a cave. There are the tiny creatures that make the cave their home and evolve bodies adapted for life in the darkness: long limbs and antennae, bodies without pigments, lights to attract prey.

Caving clubs, cave exploration and conservation

Australia's oldest caving club, The Tasmanian Caverneering Club (TCC), was founded by government geologist Sam Carey in 1946. Over time the TCC evolved into today's Hobart-based Southern Tasmanian Caverneers (STC) and the Launceston-based Northern Caverneers (NC). TCC, along with seven other mainland speleological associations, formed the Australian Speleological Federation in 1956, an organisation with an ongoing history of promoting the conservation and management of caves and karst.

Historically the caverneers have made significant contributions to what has become today's national park. Besides exploration and documentation of the caves, efforts included assisting cave guides with development in the show caves, such as installing safety railings in Marakoopa Cave, some of which remain in place today (7). A greater legacy though was when a local company applied for a mining licence in the vicinity of the highly-decorated Kubla Khan Cave. In 1972 TCC members led negotiations between the Department of Mines and the company to establish their quarry operations at another locality in the Mole Creek area, avoiding significant environmental controversy and sparing the magnificent Kubla Khan (8/9).

Unfortunately some periods in park management have seen cavers and park managers as 'opponents' to some extent. Thankfully times have changed and today's approach to national park management includes dialogues and some shared management. The caver-led group Karst Care has contributed a total of months of labour in the national park, including weed and vegetation management, cave cleaning and some maintenance. A formal memorandum of understanding between PWS and the caving community now fosters this ongoing cooperation.

Some current issues for the national park

Tourism

Tourism brings money into Tasmania and the caves are an important economic 'driver' in the Mole Creek economy. The closure of Marakoopa Cave, due to flood damage, for six months in 2016, impacted on local businesses.

PWS statistics show that 55,000 people visited the Mole Creek Karst National Park in 2014-15, mostly as visitors to the beautiful show caves of Marakoopa Cave and King Solomons Cave - an increase of 10,000 visitors in just over 10 years (10).

Tourism needs planning and ongoing thought and development. Consideration needs to be given to the visitor experience, the carrying capacity of the natural environment, the sensitive cave environment, visitor facilities, staff development and retention and associated research - to name just a few components of sustainable tourism.

While I no longer am involved in tourism management at Mole Creek, it seems that the focus remains on keeping pace with the increasing visitor numbers rather than holistic and futuristic planning. The once rustic setting of 1970-90s park buildings near Marakoopa

Rubbish in a cave *image credit: David Butler*

Cave has 'evolved' into a crowded, utilitarian environment rather than the site planned for the current, *and increasing*, visitor needs. This is no slight on PWS staff, struggling to do their best amidst rising visitor numbers, tight budgets, challenges from bushfires and floods, few resources dedicated to long-term planning and almost no connections to tourism researchers.

Since 2004 the show caves have limited the numbers of people per tour to 25-30 people, a vast improvement for staff and visitors on the previous up to 80-100 people in the busy periods.

In most show caves the guided tour experience is generally the only option that people have for experiencing caves. This is the easiest way to show people the caves and ensures that a guide is on-hand to limit people touching delicate and irreplaceable cave features. While enjoyable to many, the experience is also limited and 'you've seen one cave, you've seen them all' is a regular and unfortunate comment concerning caves.

Another challenge is that the tourism market is increasingly diverse and different groups, including different cultures, are not necessarily wanting the same experience. In her 2004 PhD, Sarah Li outlines how Chinese tourists 'gaze' at natural sites with an entirely different perspective to the western presentations which focus on naturalness and conservation (11).

Rubbish removed from cave by cavers *image credit: David Butler*

While not suggesting that cave tourism abandon a focus on conservation, there is a need to regularly challenge and reinvigorate what we are offering in terms of the visitor experience.

Climate change

Drought, bushfires, floods. Northern Tasmania has experienced all of these in just 12 months. What more frequent extremes of weather and warming tempera-

tures mean for the Mole Creek Karst National Park is unclear. But the slow-growing calcite formations within caves, such as stalactites and stalagmites, provide information on past climates. In 2016, as part of looking at past climates and flood events, scientists from the University of Melbourne collected small pieces of calcite straws in some of the caves. These had been broken in the June floods.

Looking to the future

National parks are partly protected by legislation and laws. Just as important is the protection gained when the community embraces the place, engages with it and demands its protection. This engagement needs fostering. Communities can become disengaged and perhaps even antagonistic to national park protection when they feel 'left out' of decision making and traditional use of areas. Community engagement should not be overlooked in the never-ending demands of national park management that range from blocked toilets to bushfire management.

I once heard a cave guide ask cave scientist Andy Spate what Marakoopa Cave would look like in another million years. Andy replied quickly that 'the cave would be gone'. It sums up the story of karst. It is a dynamic constant process. The caves that were here in previous times are gone, replaced with the caves we know today. In time, as water continues to drip into and flow through the caves, they will be undercut and disappear. New caves will form and old landscapes will disappear.

Enjoying caves and karst

How long since you visited Marakoopa and King Solomons caves? Go and see them. Stay a night or two and enjoy the local area.

Book a tour with Wild Cave Tours and enjoy a cave without the lights, paths and people. www.wildcavetours.com

See the recently-released film *Sixteen Legs* and learn about the ancient Tasmanian cave spider. Produced by the Bookend Trust and touring Australia very soon.

For some good cave reading:

Wonderstruck: treasuring Tasmania's cave and karst. Nic Haygarth, 2015 (www.nichaygarth.com)

Living Lights: the glowworms of Australia and New Zealand, Cathie Plowman, 2013 (lueena@bigpond.com)

Cave: Nature and Culture, Ralph and Lisa Fletcher, 2015

Mole Creek Karst National Park and Conservation Area Management Plan, Parks and Wildlife Service, 2004

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(2) Mole Creek Karst National Park and Conservation Area Management Plan, Parks and Wildlife Service, 2004, page 102

(3) www.environment.gov.au/node/20485

(4) Eberhard R, Tasmanian Report: Focus on World Heritage in Journal of the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association, No 96. September 2014, page 33.

(5) Eberhard R, Tasmanian Report: Focus on World Heritage in Journal of the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association, No 96. September 2014, page 33.

(6) Peter Dowd, pers comm, 2016

(7) Andy Spate, pers comm,

(8) Bob Woolhouse, pers comm, 2004

(9) Haygarth N, *Wonderstruck; treasuring Tasmania's caves and karst*, 2015, page 167.

(10) http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=36834

(11) http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/1677/

Cathie Plowman *is a member of Northern Caverneers and a former cave guide, ranger and cave manager at the Mole Creek Karst National Park. She thanks Andy Spate for his proof-reading of this article and Rolan Eberhard for providing reference material.*

Opinion Piece

By Jen Brown

Tasmania's Wilderness—Rare and Precious

Walking in a wet Tasmanian rainforest can be smelly, clammy and horridly uncomfortable. If you are alone and inexperienced, it can be frightening. Mud, scratchy scrub, and horizontal bush makes navigation over steep terrain incredibly difficult, if not impossible. The environment is harsh, the weather regularly wet, windy and freezing. When hot, the sun can be punishing, the flies unrelenting, the mozzies fierce and unforgiving. When wet, the leeches take no prisoners and if unnoticed, can suck away for hours.

On the other hand, the Tasmanian wilderness is breathtaking. The sense of peace it gives can be exhilarating, addictive and never forgotten. Within hours of town you can be completely alone, atop a mountain with endless views, surrounded by pure, raw nature. The rainforest is lush, older than humans, and full of intricate beauty and wonder. Even without anyone else around, there is never silence. The wind in the trees is often the loudest sound.

How do we maintain the wildness of these ancient places in a changing world? Reconciling the competing imperatives of safe human access with the protection of wilderness values has vexed Tasmanians for decades. Experiencing nature is a strong motivator for people to protect ecological integrity. But increasing their access can diminish that very experience.

The value of protected areas for tourism is often promoted as an economic alternative to extractive industries like logging or mining. While I'm not anti-tourism, my question is this: should commercial tourism development be permitted at all in protected areas if it doesn't contribute to managing the impacts of human visitation?

Reflecting on my own experiences travelling the world, I can be certain of a few things about nature-based tourism. Firstly, build it and they will come. Secondly, make it easy and safe or they won't venture at all. And thirdly, keep access limited, or the environment loses its attraction.

These observations explain my quandary about the current tourist proposals being approved by the Tasmanian Government. More huts in the Cradle Valley or on the South Coast Track are obvious examples. Both offer perfect opportunities for amazing world class tourist ventures. However, on the South Coast track at least, major improvements to the track are badly needed, right now.

To say the South Coast remains untouched is only a half truth. The beaches are littered with rubbish from fishing boats. Rats in campsites chew through tents and packs to get at food. Wallabies, possums and currawongs are habituated to stealing your supplies. The deep muddy tracks are now so wide in places they look like four-wheel-drive roads. You don't have to be unlucky to stumble across a half-buried dump site not far off the track, from someone's failed bush toilet mission. Human influence on the South Coast is a real and serious management problem already.

But my deepest fear lies in the prospect of commercial accommodation developments throughout the Wilderness World Heritage Area. Without providing increased resources and management capacity to the currently depleted Parks and Wildlife Service we risk an erosive and cumulative impact from infrastructure on sensitive environments. This could degrade the true World Heritage values that the area was listed for. It's worth a reminder of what those 'outstanding universal values' are:

- representative of the earth's evolutionary history and the most glaciated area in Australia;
- an outstanding example of one of the few remaining temperate areas which is of sufficient size for natural processes to continue;
- unique, rare and superb natural features and areas of exceptional beauty; and
- a diversity of habitats where populations of rare and endangered species of plants and animals still survive.

Lake Dobson with pencil pines, Mt Field National Park. Pencil pines often fringe alpine lakes and tarns and are very picturesque. They do not regrow after fires such as occurred in the Wilderness World Heritage Area in January 2016.

image credit: Michael Roberts

There's much more at stake than the impacts of tourism, that agencies are already struggling to cope with. Managing the increased wildfire risk to the World Heritage Area from dry lightning is a case in point. A Senate inquiry into the lessons learned from the fires of last summer recommended that Australian and State governments 'investigate a national remote area firefighting capability'. Not even 'establish' – just 'investigate'. But that was enough for the Tasmanian Coalition Senators on the committee to withdraw their support for this idea, and other recommendations for increased firefighting resources.

In 2014, the Abbott Government proposed delisting of the World Heritage site to allow logging in protected areas. The Tasmanian Government also sought to change the boundaries. It was the first time that a developed nation had sought to delist a site for economic purposes.

Ultimately the proposal was rejected by the World Heritage Committee. Although the logging plan has now been abandoned, when it comes to approving tourism ventures, it raises serious questions about the Tasmanian government's commitment to protecting the area's unique natural and cultural values, and also the extent to which the Tasmanian Aboriginal community will be involved.

If private huts are built with exclusive access for those who can afford it there should be cheaper options available for the general public. And what of disabled access? Where is the equity in opening up access to the elite with the time and money to afford the experience, while restricting access to those that cannot?

A more equitable approach is to build public huts like those that already exist on the Overland Track, manage access with permits, and keep the tracks well maintained without building walking highways. Perhaps the best solution is to simply upgrade the tracks and campsites for those who want to walk and leave any further development for outside the protected areas.

While UNESCO and the recently revised management plan don't specifically rule out all development in the World Heritage Area, surely new tourism development should not be approved without boosting the resources and management capacity to deal with existing issues, before adding more negative impacts.

Jen Brown is a nurse, law student, avid bushwalker, and ultra-marathon trail runner, in 2015 she ran 164km length of the Port Davey and South Coast track. In 2016 she ran as the Greens candidate for Denison in the Federal election.

This article was originally published as a Talking Point in The Mercury of 27/12/2016

The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the TNPA.

Florentine and Naturaliste Peaks, Mt Field National Park. Alpine vegetation such as this is not fire adapted. The soil itself can be destroyed by fires such as happened elsewhere in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area in January-February 2016. *image credit: Michael Roberts*

Lion Rock, seen from South Coast Track *image credit: Michael Roberts*

Lion Rock, South Coast Track (Evening) *image credit: Michael Roberts*

Pine Lake, Central Plateau *image credit: Michael Roberts*

Deciduous beech, Mt Field National Park *image credit: Michael Roberts*

Book Review

by Jane Wilson

The field of dreams: walking in Tasmania's first national park by Mark Clemens

"The field of dreams: walking in Tasmania's first national park" by Mark Clemens, published by Mark & Janet Clemens, Hobart 2016. [Hardback, 107 pages-16 essays and 44 images]

Available for purchase via Mark Clemens' website http://markclemens.com.au, Fullers Bookshop and The Hobart Bookshop – recommended retail price: $70.00

Available for loan from LINC Tasmania (6 copies).

The author is a gifted writer. His book is eminently readable and readers who want to be better informed about Mt Field National Park are well served. The book's essays share glimpses into the history, natural history, nomenclature, flora, fauna and geology of the area and the presence of Aboriginal Tasmanians in times past. The writing is skilfully woven around delightful tales of Clemens' walks in all weathers. These easily paint pictures of the landscapes in all their moods and convey the joy and connection with nature that being in the park brings to him.

Sadly, the power of the park's nature that is transmitted so well by the text is not matched by many of the photographs. Fine weather images showing mountain ridges with tarns in the foreground predominate. Very few portray the many moods of forest and mountain which a park visitor can experience. Sunlight or shadow, mountain mist, snow, rain and ice and close-ups of exquisite flora and fauna are lacking. Images chosen to accompany essays often do tie in perfectly with the text but on occasion they do not. For example, the vivid word picture of the Lions Den boulder field includes the descriptors "…gargantuan…", "…deep-throated…" and "…monumental reliquary…" (p 33). It is not matched by the chosen image (p 30).

The publication of this book was timed to coincide with the centenary of the proclamation of Mt Field as a national park, the first in Tasmania. Clemens acknowledges William Crooke, founder of the TNPA's predecessor the National Park Association (NPA), but only in passing (p 8). The NPA, under Crooke's direction, was the major force behind the declaration of the park. Important events in the park's life are sprinkled throughout the narrative, rather than being brought together in one essay. The author doesn't hesitate to share his concerns about the past and ongoing impacts of some human activities on park values. He writes of the deep disappointment he felt upon reaching the summit of Mt Field West only to find his enjoyment of being in a wild place destroyed by the viewfield of forestry operations outside the park boundary (p 46).

One complete essay ("The Club") details the vital role the Hobart Walking Club (HWC) and some members, pioneering conservationists Jack Thwaites, Jessie Luckman and others, had in stewardship of Mt Field and in advocating preservation of the wild areas of Tasmania. The failed campaign in 1946-1947 by Luckman and others to try and stop the excision of a large area of the Florentine forest lands from the park was a tour de force (p 22). However, Clemens fails to acknowledge that since the 1970s the impetus for saving wild lands in Tasmania has shifted from recreation-focused groups, such as the HWC, to a far more politically aware conservation movement. The listing of Mt Field and some adjacent lands on the World Heritage register in 2013 is noted briefly by the author. It originated from the now scrapped Tasmanian Forest Agreement 2012. The 11 signatories included The Wilderness Society, The Wilderness Society (Tasmania), the Australian Conservation Foundation and forest industry groups, but not the HWC.

Clemens sounds no warning bell nor makes a clarion

call to readers to act to make sure the park is protected into the future. Hopefully, his optimism, borne of his many park experiences, is justified. He draws hope from the love of the park he witnesses from thousands of visitors of all ages on the weekend of the Fagus Festival in 2016 (book conclusion p 106). And, while the book may fall a bit short in some respects, it is a success. It has a strong voice, even as a gentle, loving memoir of a special place, and cannot help but engender feelings of respect and caring for Mt Field.

THE 2016 BUTTONGRASS BALL —Delightful Dancing & A Focus on Climate Change

The annual Buttongrass Ball honours, with a mixture of seriousness and fun, buttongrass and Tasmania's very special natural environment, all Tasmanians who in the last 40,000 years have walked the buttongrass moorlands, and the many musicians and dancers who have helped shape Tasmania's unique culture.

Although all nineeen Buttongrass Balls have been wonderful nights of dancing, this year's Ball was particularly special as it was held in the magnificent Hobart Town Hall, this being one of several balls held in the Town Hall this year in honour of its 150th anniversary.

Having the Ball in the Town Hall seemed to produce a higher level of energy in the dancing, and to encourage a little more dressing up and a fine supper most worthy of such a lovely venue. There was also a good turnout.

Otherwise, the Ball was much as in previous years, with two fabulous bands - the *VerandahCoots*, with their accomplished playing of many traditional Tasmanian tunes, and *The Devil's Own* bringing a very danceable energy with their music. David Wanless prepared a wonderful program of dances, including old favourites, traditional Tasmanian favourites, and some more recent Overland Track Suite dances, including my most favorite dance – the Pelion Waltz (thank you David). The regular small band of helpers ensured the smooth running of the Ball and a very elegant supper room.

For many years now each Ball has had an environmental theme of relevance. This year's theme – *Fire in the Wilderness* - was very topical: It reminded us of the widespread fires in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area in January this year due to lightning strikes, and of the devastating consequences such fires can have in this World Heritage Area, with its fire-sensitive organic soils and vegetation, in particular many of the alpine and sub-alpine species, including the fire-sensitive and slow growing endemic Pencil Pine. The theme also highlighted the need for action on climate change since, with climate change, dry lightning strikes such as those in January are predicted to become more common, potentially putting the natural values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and other natural areas in Tasmania at significant risk.

The Buttongrass Ball also helped support Tasmania's natural environment and its protection, with all proceeds going to the Tasmanian National Parks Association. The TNPA is most grateful for this donation, and wishes to thank all those involved in organising and running the Ball, in particular the two bands and David Wanless. Our thanks also go to the Ball volunteer helpers, Plants of Tasmania who loaned pots of buttongrass to decorate the hall, the Hobart City Council for making the Town Hall available, and, last but not least, the dancers without whom a Ball would not be a Ball.

Anne McConnell (TNPA Buttongrass Ball Liaison).

Poster promoting 2016 Buttongrass Ball

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: Jen Brown, Anne McConnell, Cathie Plowman, Michael Roberts, Nick Sawyer, Jane Wilson. Original articles in TNPA News may be reproduced, but please acknowledge the author and source.

Contributions to TNPA News No.25 are welcome (deadline Monday June 26 2017). Please send contributions to: admin@tnpa.asn.au (attention: TNPA News editor).

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Pine Lake, Central Plateau *image credit: Michael Roberts*

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Meetings Management Committee meetings are held approximately 10 times per year. Members and supporters are welcome to attend meetings and are notified of date, time and venue in the TNPA email communique. As time/venue may change close to time of meeting check with Secretariat (0427 854 684) before attending.

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