TNPA NEWS

Tasmanian National Parks Association

TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION INC *Newsletter No 26 Autumn 2018*

Remote beach, Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area
Image credit: Nicholas Sawyer

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A wilderness area is "an area that is of sufficient size, remoteness and naturalness to enable the long-term integrity of its natural systems, biodiversity and processes, the maintenance of cultural landscapes and the provision of a wilderness recreation experience."

(Quote is from the 2016 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan)

THANK YOU

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EDITORIAL

Since the publication of TNPA News #25 the TNPA has been as busy as ever. We are very happy to announce our new website, which 'went live' in late 2017. If you have not yet viewed the site we invite you to take a look:

www.tnpa.org.au

A lot of work went into the new website and the TNPA would like to thank Grant Dixon, particularly, and Nick Sawyer, for the many hours that they spent on this, over quite a few months. The TNPA also acknowledges the work of John Sampson, who designed and set up the website and has continued to assist the TNPA with 'technical' matters associated with operating the site.

In late 2017/early 2018, with the State election looming, the TNPA met with, or communicated with, representatives from the three major Tasmanian political parties in order to learn about their policies on national parks and reserves. The TNPA also formulated its own election manifesto (this can be viewed at www.tnpa.org.au).

A theme that occurs in most of the articles in this issue of TNPA News is the pressure to 'open up' wild and undisturbed parts of Tasmania for so-called ecotourism developments. This was an election 'promise' of the previous Tasmanian Liberal government and with the Liberals returned for another four years it is likely that this agenda will continue.

It is not just in Tasmania that national parks are now being viewed as a goldmine for commercial tourism operators and unfortunately there is a ready market for their 'products'. Outdoor 'adventure' tourism, including activities such as mountain biking and trail running, is currently very popular, as is 'glamping' (glamour-camping—typically a commercial bushwalking trip with overnight accommodation in comfortable cabins with showers and good food) - there is an appetite for experiencing wild and sometimes remote places but with minimal effort, risk or discomfort, regardless of the often substantial cost. Helicopter tourism (being dropped into, and lifted out of, remote places) is on the rise. Tasmania's Three Capes Track is viewed as a model to be emulated not just here in Tasmania but in other parts of Australia as well.

The following are the **TNPA's Principles for sustainable tourism in Tasmania's national parks**

- Tourism and recreation interests have a responsibility to pass on to future generations Tasmania's exceptional natural and cultural heritage in no poorer condition than we inherited it.
- Wilderness is a diminishing global asset which needs to be protected, not compromised.
- Tourism ventures will comply with sound planning principles and will be established and managed in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner.
- Where facilities can be developed outside the TWWHA and national parks, such facilities and services will not be provided within the TWWHA or national parks.
- New tourism initiatives will support and commercially contribute to adjacent communities.
- Assessment of new tourism initiatives will be undertaken in a publicly transparent and accountable manner.

Correction to statement on page 5 of previous issue of TNPA News (#25 Spring 2017):

"kunanyi is an exceptional area of reserved land possessing natural and other values equivalent to those of our national parks, in which mountain bike riding is prohibited."

The article stated that mountain bike riding is prohibited in Tasmania's national parks. This is not strictly correct. Whilst it is certainly prohibited on walking tracks and beaches in national parks it is permitted on roads, fire trails and four wheel drive tracks within most parks.

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

by Martin Hawes

Why wilderness should be remote

This is an edited version of a paper first published in the *International Journal of Wilderness* volume 23 (June 2017).

Introduction

What impact do developments like tourist lodges and helipads have on wilderness values? What are the consequences of constructing a walkers' hut in a previously hut-free wilderness? These questions have immediate relevance in Tasmania, where the government is encouraging developments that could include the installation of huts, luxury lodges, and helicopter landing sites in remote parts of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA).

Advocates of such developments have argued that the impacts would be confined to small areas. The same argument could be used to justify the construction of infrastructure such as roads, cable cars, or mobile phone towers in or adjacent to wilderness areas. The flaw in this argument is that human structures and activities have impacts beyond their immediate vicinity, impacts that can be detrimental to the recreational, aesthetic, and other intangible values of wilderness. To protect these values, we need to recognise remoteness as a defining characteristic of wilderness and ensure that wilderness reserves protect remote country.

The significance of remoteness

Remoteness is an essential ingredient of what has been called the 'wilderness experience'. The further one stands from roads, buildings and other trappings of modern civilisation, the greater one's opportunity for experiencing solitude and a sense of 'immersion' in the natural world. The phrase 'modern civilisation' acknowledges that many areas now regarded as wilderness have been (and in many cases still are) occupied, utilised and modified by indigenous people following traditional wilderness-based ways of life.

Photo 1: New River Lagoon on Tasmania's South Coast. The South Coast Track follows the beach. *Image credit: Grant Dixon*

Natural landscapes that include remote areas are conducive to the appreciation of boundlessness, immensity, and that special quality of silence that one senses in wild places. Visiting remote places, especially those remote enough to require at least one overnight stay, requires undertaking journeys that demand self-reliance, heightening the sense of 'passage' to a more primal state. Remote places frequently provide the settings for profound and life-changing experiences, for personal growth, for artistic inspiration, and for awakening what Landres et al (2015) described as 'a sense of relationship and interconnectedness with the community of life'.

The presence of infrastructure and other evidence of modern society impacts the qualities of wilderness in a variety of ways, often over considerable distances. A hut offers shelter, but at the price of self-reliance. A helipad signals that the peace of one's environs is intermittently shattered. An airstrip or mining scar can mar the viewfield of distant peaks. The knowledge that a summit has been accessorised with a radio tower alters one's perception of the landscape that contains it, whether one is standing in that landscape or contemplating it from afar.

Remoteness can protect cultural values such as those associated with indigenous relics. It can also have ecological benefits, providing a defence against disturbances such as air pollution, species invasion, fire, and poaching. Reserves designed to keep places remote tend to be large, have convex boundaries, and have low boundary-to-area ratios: characteristics that enhance their suitability for protecting ecological values on a landscape scale.

Remoteness as a defining characteristic of wilderness

Wilderness has often been defined as remote or in terms that imply remoteness. For example, early 20th century US conservationist Aldo Leopold defined wilderness as a continuous stretch of natural country large enough to accommodate a two-week pack trip. Robertson et al (1992) proposed that wilderness should be 'remote at its core from points of mechanised access and other evidence of colonial and modern technological society'. The requirement in the 1964 US Wilderness Act (the world's first legislation designed specifically to protect wilderness) that a wilderness area provide 'outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation' can be interpreted as implying that it should include remote country.

But remoteness is not an explicit requirement of the US Wilderness Act, and it is not clearly implied by the definitions of wilderness adopted by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and the European Commission. Each of these definitions characterises wilderness areas as large, natural and free of permanent settlements. The requirement that an area be large does not guarantee that any part of it will be remote, or that its qualities of remoteness will be adequately protected. For example, the US Pacific Coast region of Washington state's Olympic Natural Park, which is a designated 'wilderness area', covers over 17,000 hectares but is only a few kilometres wide at any point. If two hectares in the remotest part of a designated wilderness area were rezoned to accommodate a tourist

lodge, it is not clear from the IUCN definition that any values would be lost apart from the two-hectare deficit.

Detailed guidelines have been published for interpreting and applying the IUCN, European Commission and US Wilderness Act definitions of wilderness. Each of these guidelines includes statements that can be interpreted as acknowledging the significance of remoteness, but none of them explicitly requires wilderness to be remote. Hence, none of them definitively excludes enclaves or boundary indentations that compromise remoteness.

The definition of wilderness in the 2016 TWWHA Management Plan is reasonably good, describing a wilderness area as 'an area that is of sufficient size, remoteness and naturalness to enable the long-term integrity of its natural systems, diversity and processes, the maintenance of cultural landscapes and the provision of a wilderness recreational experience'. Unfortunately, the Plan fails to build on this definition by identifying the protection of wilderness as a management objective, and the zoning scheme fails to adequately protect the existing wilderness values of the region (see the case study below).

Defining and quantifying wild character

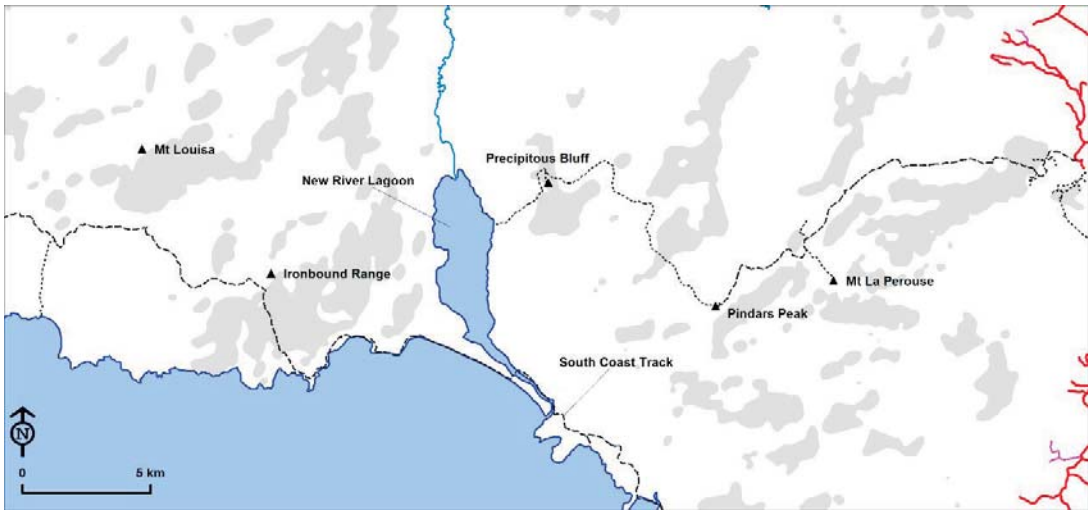
The division of natural areas into 'wilderness' and 'non-wilderness' is necessarily somewhat arbitrary and tends to obscure the fact that wild areas typically exhibit a range of 'wildness' depending on their degree of naturalness and remoteness. One way around this difficulty is to map wildness, or to be more precise 'wild character', as a continuum based on measurements of factors such as distance from roads and the degree to which areas have been disturbed by human activity. I define wild character as the degree to which a location is undisturbed by *and remote from* the influences of modern technological society. Wild character can thus be regarded as varying from 'intensively developed' to 'remote and pristine'.

Australia has been a leader in developing GIS-based methodologies to map wild character, thanks especially to the work of Rob Lesslie and Margaret Maslen at the Australian Heritage Commission in the 1980s and early 90s. Variations of the Lesslie and Maslen methodology have been used to measure wild character across Australia, across the TWWHA (most recently to generate the wilderness map in the 2016 Management Plan), as well as across Europe and a number of specific European countries. A similar methodology has been used to measure wild character in the United States, although the US approach downplays the significance of remoteness.

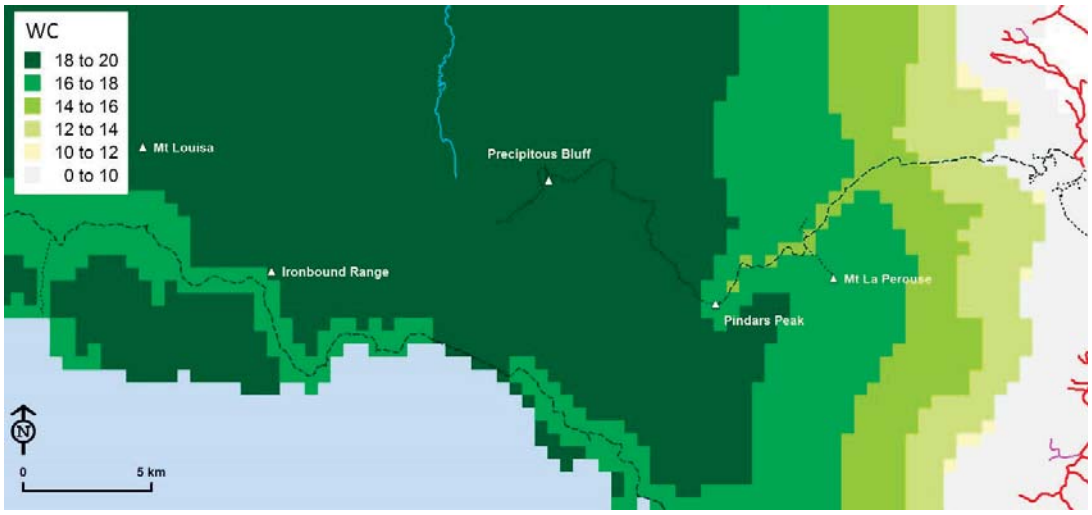
Remoteness case study: Tasmania's South Coast

To illustrate how a development such as hut construction can impact wild character, and how such impact can be quantified, consider two hypothetical developments within the TWWHA. Both developments would involve the construction of visitor accommodation near New

Photo 2: Recently constructed walkers' hut complex on the Three Capes Track. *Image credit: Rob Blakers*

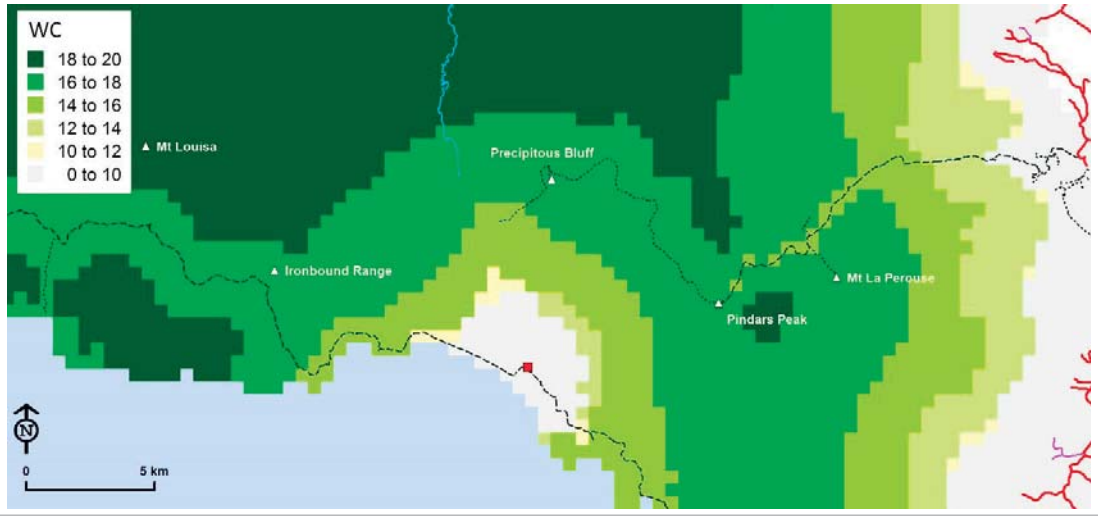


Map 1 – Section of Tasmania's South Coast and hinterland. Dashed/dotted lines show major/minor walking tracks (trails).



Map 2 – Current distribution of wild character across the region shown in Map 1.

Map 3 – Projected distribution of wild character following hypothetical construction of a walkers' hut complex (indicated by red square).



Map 4 – Projected distribution of wild character following hypothetical construction of a lodge with helicopter access for clients.

River Lagoon on Tasmania's 84-kilometre South Coast Track, which is currently hut-free except at its western trailhead (see Photo 1 and Map 1).

The first development would comprise a complex of continuously staffed walkers' huts, similar to those recently constructed on the Three Capes Track (see Photo 2). The huts would be serviced by helicopter but would be accessible to the general public only by foot. The second development would involve the construction of a tourist lodge in the same location, with clients accessing the lodge by helicopter. Either development would be permitted under the 2016 TWWHA Management Plan, which allows for hut development in Recreation Zones and specifically on the South Coast. (This exemplifies the inadequacy of the zoning plan for protecting the wilderness values of the TWWHA.)

The distribution of wild character across this section of the South Coast and its hinterland was calculated pre- and post-development for each scenario using a modified version of the Lesslie and Maslen methodology. Map 2 shows the current distribution. Note that the wild character of much of the region is in the highest category (18-20 on a scale of 0-20). Lower values occur near walking tracks and in the vicinity of roads to the east.

Map 3 shows the wild character following construction of a staffed hut complex. As Map 3 shows, the development would have a substantial impact on wild character, even if the direct biophysical impacts of the development were confined to its immediate footprint. The losses of wild character reflect the fact that, for example, the previously remote coastline east of the Ironbound Range would fall within a day's walk of the development. Helicopters servicing the development would be audible and visible, particularly in its vicinity. The development would be visible from the air, and probably from some ground-level vantage points. The presence of the huts would degrade the undeveloped quality of the region and would reduce the recreational challenge of the six- to eight-day South Coast walk, even for walkers who did not use the huts.

Map 4 shows the impact of the 'tourist lodge' development. This would affect an additional component of wild character, as the helipad associated with the lodge would be a point of access for its clients. Places that currently take days to reach would be accessible within hours of stepping off a city street. Wild character would drop to frontcountry levels up to two kilometres from the lodge and would decrease by at least two units across more than 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of country. Note that the impact would be asymmetric, as wild character takes account of walking times and is therefore dependent on factors such as vegetation density and the location of walking tracks.

Protecting wilderness

Protecting wilderness requires maintaining the natural and undeveloped condition of wilderness and of the country that keeps it remote. Like wilderness itself, 'remoting country' must be kept free of major infrastructure such as roads, dams and tourist lodges, although its outer boundaries may border such features. Where wilderness meets or is close to coastlines, reserves should ideally extend offshore to ensure that wilderness values are not compromised by offshore developments.

The primary management objective of wilderness reserves should be maintaining the wild character of wilderness, whilst allowing indigenous people to maintain their traditional wilderness-based ways of life and customs (to use terminology adopted by IUCN). Secondary objectives may include restoring wild character (for example by closing and rehabilitating vehicular tracks) and maintaining the wild character of less remote areas. As an aid to achieving these objectives, both when designing reserves and when assessing the impacts of possible developments, the distribution of wild character across managed areas should be quantitatively assessed under different scenarios of development and boundary alignment.

Summary

Definitions of wilderness that disregard or downplay the significance of remoteness leave wilderness vulnerable to developments that can substantially compromise its values. These values are best protected by defining wild character in terms of naturalness and remoteness, and by making the preservation of wild character the primary objective of wilderness reserves.

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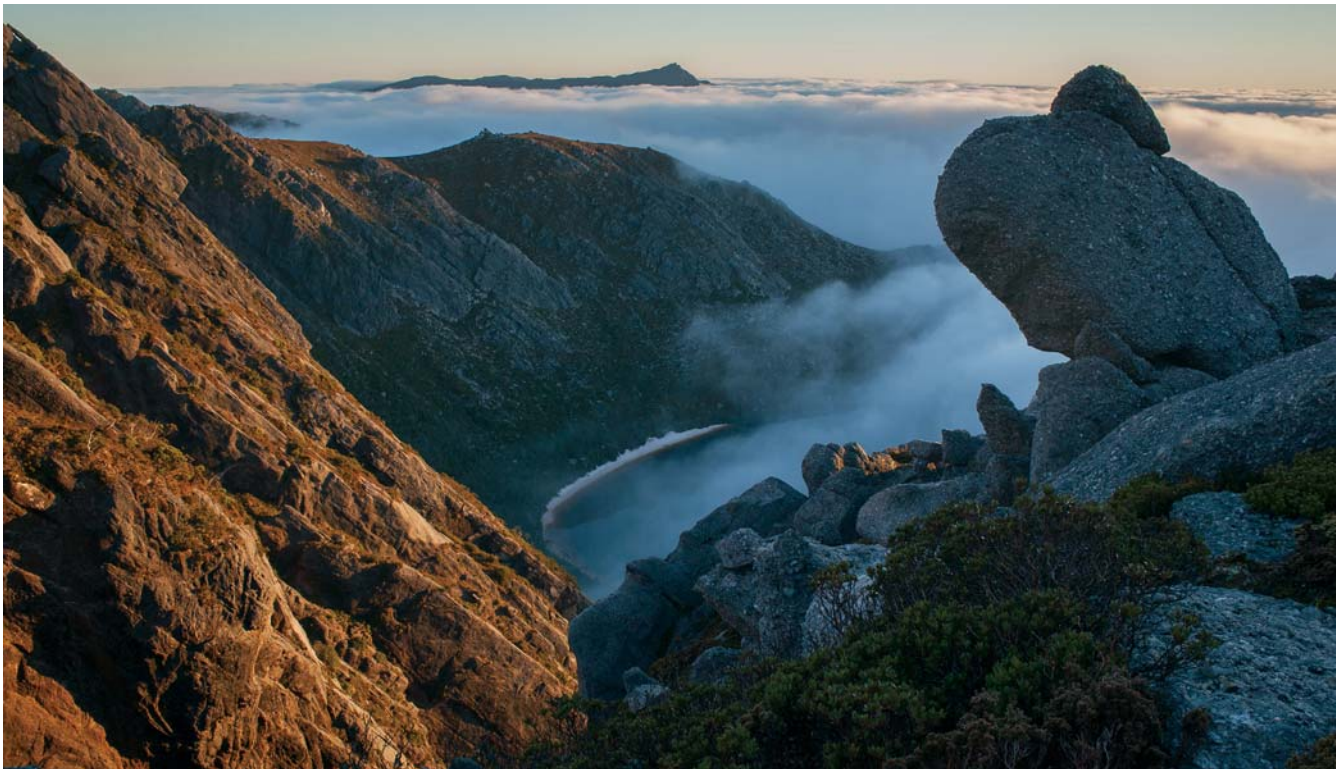


Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

by Nick Sawyer

Development proposals on reserved land in Tasmania: Will 'environmental' impact assessment miss the point?

Tasmania is facing unprecedented pressure for tourism developments within our national parks and other reserved land driven by the government's policy to 'unlock' our reserves. When concerns are raised about the assessment of such proposals, the public are generally assured that there will be comprehensive scrutiny of the proposal and opportunity for public input.

The reality is not quite so simple. Environmental impact assessment is often assumed to be a holistic process in which all issues receive full and balanced consideration. In practice it is part of a statutory (defined in law) process of development assessment. It does not necessarily consider all values, only values as defined in legislation or subordinate documents (in the case of national parks, management plans).

National parks are proclaimed primarily for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. These values are generally acknowledged and adequately protected—a major resource development (forestry or mining) in a national park would be unlikely to receive approval, but the footprint of a tourism development, even a large one, is orders of magnitude smaller; it is likely be argued that it is an appropriate use and that its impacts on natural and cultural heritage are not significant. Its major impact is likely to be on the experience of visitors, particularly those who are not using the facility itself, but this may not receive much, if any, consideration when the proposal is assessed.

Consider the proposed Mount Wellington Cable Car. Neither the base station nor the pylons are likely to be located on land with high conservation value. The excessively large structure at the Pinnacle will obliterate a corresponding area of alpine vegetation but this vegetation community extends across much of the summit plateau; its loss is unlikely to provide sufficient justification for denying approval. The major impacts of the cable car are on the human experience of The Mountain; the view from the city and suburbs; the view of users on the mountain and other parts of the Wellington Range; for visitors near the cableway, the experience of cable cars passing overhead overwhelming the otherwise impressive natural setting (e.g. the Organ Pipes). These are the crucial issues for the assessment.

The wilderness qualities of the more remote parts of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) are highly valued by visitors. Wilderness is "land … remote from [mechanised] access … and from within which there is little or no consciousness of the environmental disturbance of contemporary people" (1999 TWWHA Management Plan, quoting Kirkpatrick & Haney, 1980). Sightseeing helicopter flights are proliferating, some of the proposed tourism developments in the TWWHA involve flying clients into the area in helicopters and many proposed developments will require additional helicopter flights to transport supplies to huts. It is hard to think of any more intrusive reminder of one's lack of remoteness from the environmental disturbance of contemporary people than a nearby helicopter yet there is little explicit requirement to assess this impact on the experience of visitors.

Concerns about the visitor experience are unlikely to feature prominently in the assessment because the relevant legislation is weak. Decades ago, when our current planning legislation was first implemented, there was a consensus that national parks and reserves were out-of-bounds for development. There was no need for a rigorous, legally defined process for the assessment of developments in national parks and we still do not have such legislation even though times have changed! In the case of the TWWHA we have even gone backwards; the 1999 management plan provided the authority to require a comprehensive assessment but this has gone from the 2016 plan.

This is alarming because a major role of national parks is as a place for visitors to experience nature. There are plenty of places around the world with more spectacular scenery than can be found in Tasmania but very few that offer better opportunities to experience wilderness and wild nature. Preservation of these opportunities is vital to all who appreciate our parks and also for Tasmania's tourism industry. **Surveys consistently identify wilderness, nature and heritage among visitors' top priorities —we cannot afford to let a few ill-conceived tourism developments detract from these qualities.**

Related to the impact of tourism development on the experience of visitors is the question of what infrastructure is really justified within a national park. To maintain a natural visitor experience this should be kept to the minimum necessary to protect the environment and provide basic essentials for visitors, anything else can be provided with less impact outside the park boundary. This fundamental consideration is often distracted by justifications involving sensitive architecture and sustainable design when the real question is "should the building be there at all?"

The World Heritage Convention (administered by the Commonwealth) provides an additional layer of protection for the World Heritage Area but this does not necessarily mean that the Commonwealth Government can or will intervene to save the Tasmanian wilderness from excessive tourism development. Apart from the likely lack of political will in the Turnbull government, World Heritage values (**which do not include wilderness**) are worded in very broad terms, e.g. "outstanding example representing the major stages of the earth's evolutionary history". World Heritage status may result in additional scrutiny but will not necessarily lead to any additional protection of natural and cultural heritage or the visitor experience.

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

by Don Knowler

Protecting Wild Places

*Author **Don Knowler** voiced his concern about the commercialisation of the Tasmanian wilderness when he was invited to address the annual general meeting of the Tasmanian National Parks Association on November 26 2018.*

Here is his speech ...

The battle to protect and conserve Tasmania's pristine wild places was brought home to me within days of arriving in the state from Britain 20 years ago.

I was staying with my mother-in-law in Howrah at the time and wandered down to the Shoreline shopping centre where I came across an exhibition being mounted by the Tasmanian Conservation Trust.

Peter McGlone, who was manning the Trust's stall, was quite possibly the first person I had met in Tasmania outside of my wife's family.

I was intrigued because he was holding a sprig of gorse, explaining that it was a weed in Tasmania and he had recently been engaged in digging it up from Tasmanian soil.

There was something ironic in the conversation because just weeks previously I had been engaged in planting gorse in Britain, a vital species vanishing from the British countryside.

Irony, I was to discover, travels with wildlife conservation, not just in Tasmania but world-wide.

Gorse in Britain is a signature species of plant for the most threatened environment in the British Isles. It grows in the sandy soils forming a belt across southern England, areas that can be considered wilderness because they have never been cultivated and never built on, until now.

There is even a nature reserve at Arne, in the south-west county of Dorset, dedicated to gorse where, as a volunteer, I planted the stuff just before coming to Australia.

These sandy soils were dumped by glaciers at the end of the ice age and for thousands of years were classified as common land. Animals allowed to roam on them never did any damage because they were merely domestic forms of animals, like wild boar, which had gone before. And these areas retained their unique flora and fauna. The

sandy heaths of southern England might have been unfit for cultivation but the land has proven to be ideal for housing development close to London and south-west towns and cities. I grew up on a vast housing estate on the fringe of London constructed on such soils. Luckily some of the common land remained, in the shape of Horsell Common near the town of Woking where H G Wells set his War of the Worlds novel, and I discovered their worth when I first started to develop an interest in wildlife while still at primary school. In fact these areas might well have inspired that interest.

Although they were not classed as national parks as such, I saw these stunted forests as truly wild places and as I grew older I went in search of areas with that designation, mainly in the north of England.

And I soon learned that wilderness and national parks could represent different concepts.

I actually worked on a farm in the Peak District national park but believed at the time these were wild places even though the park mainly composed ancient farmland dissected by drystone walls. Only the tops of the moors, along the Pennine Way forming the spine of Britain between England and Scotland could be classed as truly wild.

When my travels took me to East and Southern Africa I continued to go in search of what I considered at the time as wilderness. I ignored the roads and railway lines dissecting national parks where elephants roamed free.

I lived in America for a time and didn't explore some truly wild places there, to my regret, so I can't comment on these. I spent my time in New York writing a book about Central Park, which in its own sense can be termed a wild place!

And then I came to Tasmania and realised what wild and wilderness really meant, discovering only recently that there are very strict guidelines set down by international conservation bodies defining wilderness. **And it doesn't include roads or railways or even huts.**

In recent years I have had the chance to look again at "wild" places in southern Africa and was shocked and appalled by the Kruger Park and the Victoria Falls National Park, in the light of my Tasmanian experience.

The Kruger Park has a more extensive network of roads from the time I remember it 40 years ago, and franchise fast-food outlets in its camps. And the Victoria Falls is ringed by a high fence, guaranteeing that visitors pay a $50 American dollar entrance fee to view it. The Victoria Falls serves to give the Zimbabwean Government precious foreign currency.

My disenchantment with the places I once loved in Africa has coincided with a push by the Tasmanian Government to open our own wild areas to business.

I'm not really qualified to comment on specific projects—beyond the proposed cable car up kunanyi/Mount Wellington—but at the same time I have become increasingly worried about this assault on wild places in general.

I might have tolerated roads once, and crossed the Wankie park in the old Rhodesia by train (seeing elephants and lions from the carriage windows) but in recent years I have become a wilderness tragic.

I'm like the smoker who gives up cigarettes. There's no one worse amid tobacco fumes than a reformed smoker and amid the scent of eucalypt oil in the gum forests, a reformed wilderness tourist.

And the word irony keeps emerging. Am I the only person who sees the notion that we ruin the very thing we consider beautiful and precious by "opening it up for business" so greater numbers of people can see it, and worse, exploit it?

We are told trails that at the moment present a challenge to cross them in pristine areas of the Tasmanian wilderness, and add to the spirit of adventure, need huts so more and more people can enjoy them.

We are told that wild areas, wilderness and otherwise, should be opened up for mass tourism. These areas can't just lie there, they must turn a profit.

But so often these apparently harmless and non-intrusive schemes to allow more people to see, feel and hear wild places turn out to be the thin edge of the wedge.

I was once a great supporter of the bike and mountain bike lobby, seeing value, for instance, in turning disused railway lines into bike tracks.

This has been successfully achieved in Britain and I've walked many of these level trails through some spectacular country inaccessible by any other means.

When I first learned of the north-south bike track across kunanyi/Mt Wellington, I walked it and had an enjoyable experience, walking but at the same time showing the cyclists respect because it was, after all, their trail.

A gentle bike ride, however, has suddenly become something else. Now the bikers are demanding high-speech, zig-zag tracks down mountainsides, and a bike ride has become an adventure sport.

I'm not opposed to living life at the edge, however. But plans for such a track cut into kunanyi/Mt Wellington concern me. I gather there are plans for a downhill/gravity track from Big Bend on the mountain down to Junction Cabin.

I see that in recent years mountain biking has been listed on the Wellington Cable Car Company's website as one of the pursuits the cable car will make possible.

But why do these things like bike tracks have to be in high-value natural areas? Around Hobart I can think of many hilly areas already modified by farming or even industrial activity, like rubbish tips. Perhaps we could have descending, zig-zag bike trails threading their way through the forests of alien gorse which litter the State.

Again, like five-star huts for hikers, I see cyclists as the thin end of the wedge. Allow one bike and you have a bike track, and a cable car to take bikers to it.

As I say in my book, *The Shy Mountain*, the beauty of kunanyi/ Mount Wellington is that it brings the south-west wilderness right to the very doorstep of a state capital city.

A cable car would reverse the process. It would take the city—with its glass, and concrete and steel and its commercialism—to the mountain.

The government mantra of being open for business, opening up our wild areas, also raises the question of access by air, and noise pollution. I accept there must be air routes open to the far south, even for emergencies. I've travelled to Melaleuca by Par-Avion and know the orange-bellied parrot recovery program could not be possible without this air link.

But one or two planes a day is something different to frequent flights by helicopter, dropping off tourists here and there. I've written in the past of the movement in the United States to declare a portion of at least one national park a human-noise-free zone.

Gordon Hempton has established what he describes as "one square inch of silence" in the Olympia national park in Washington state. He describes the site in the Hoh Rainforest as the most pristine, untouched and ecologically diverse area of the United States and has even persuaded some airlines to route their high-flying aircraft away from the area so the people down on the ground don't even see their vapour trails.

Is this man eccentric to the point of being a little mad? I certainly don't think so. Part of my latest Victoria Falls experience was having the day ruined by three helicopters at once hovering over the falls, one afternoon drowning out the call of the beautiful Heuglin's robin, a bird I had searched for without success in all the years I had spent in Africa. And here it was in a patch of rainforest at the falls edge, and I couldn't hear its song, one of the most beautiful in Africa.

We hear the phrase 'loving places to death', and the Victoria Falls is a perfect example of what dangers lie in allowing more and more of what I call "trippers" access to nature's masterpieces, to allow them to have an experience beyond just walking and seeing and hearing.

Closer to home we have a place I love, not wilderness as such, just the route of a road.

I am intimately familiar with The Neck on Bruny Island, having watched penguins and short-tailed shearwaters there on many a spring and summer night. The paving of

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

the road was a concern because I thought the penguins I had seen at night on its dirt surface would end up as road-kill. I'm told tunnels under the new road have alleviated that problem but I think we have all been blindsided by the decision to site a car park at The Neck which ruins the view from the lookout, looking south.

Now that is ironic. And as I said earlier, in my lifetime irony seems to have travelled with the trashing of the environment.

Take that housing estate I told you about, Sheerwater in Surrey, where I grew up.

It was designed to provide a home for us Londoners displaced by the bombing during the Blitz in the Second World War. About 6000 Cockneys were planted down on what had been considered wilderness, even if it was only about 35 kilometres from London.

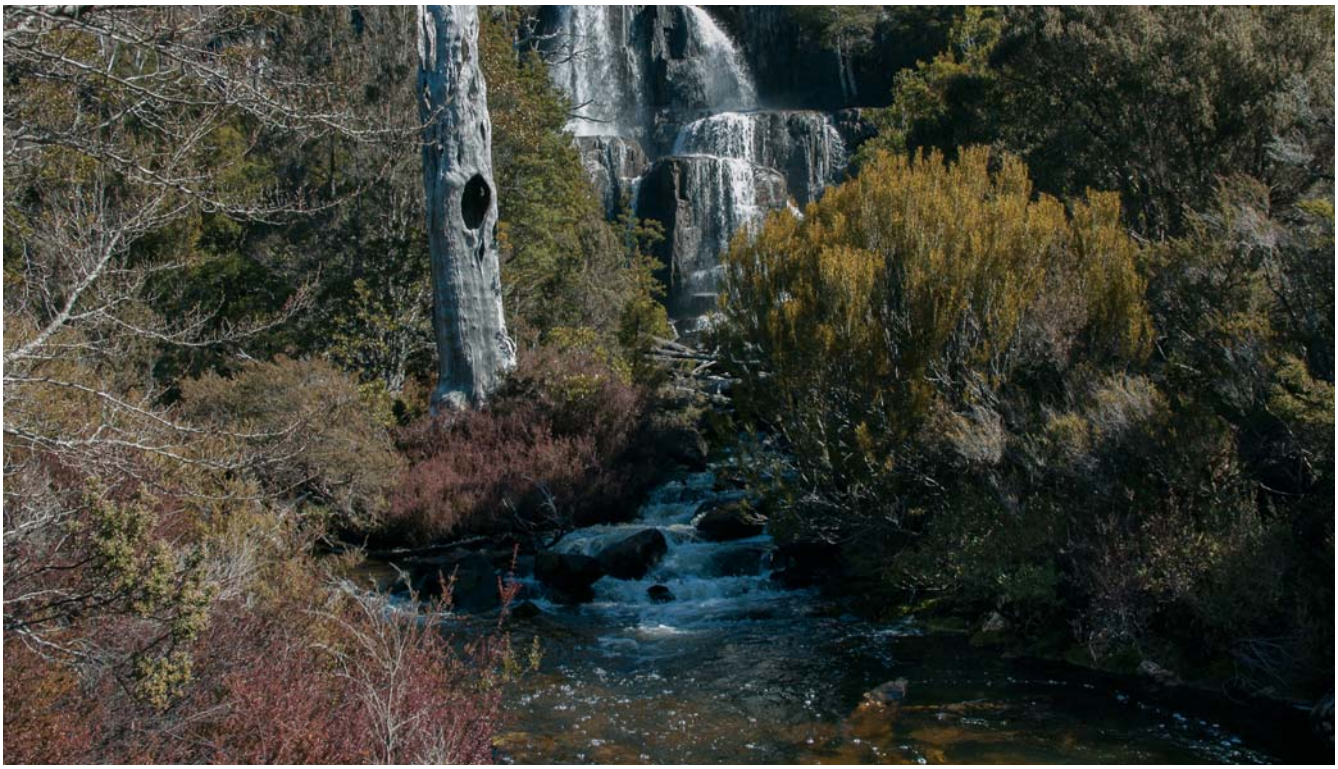
Soon after the birches and the pines, and the gorse, were cleared, and construction of more than 1,500 homes started, the planners and developers suddenly realised the Cockney 'sparras' being transplanted to the countryside from Bermondsey and Rotherhithe and the Old Kent Road would need a focal point, a pub.

One was soon built on what had been the pristine forest—and it was named The Birch and Pines.

*__Donald Knowler__ has had a long career as a journalist and is author of a number of books. Don is well known to residents of southern Tasmania for his *On The Wing* column in the Saturday *Mercury*.

His latest book, *The Shy Mountain*, an account of daily walks and observations (not just of birds!) over a whole year, on Hobart's kunanyi/Mt Wellington, was published in 2017.

Don's comments on wilderness reflect his own personal viewpoint.



Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

by Grant Dixon

The Geeves Effect

Another tourism development proposal that will impact wilderness

Amongst the raft of tourism development proposals that would impact Tasmania's wilderness, one that would have a particularly significant negative effect on wild character is "The Geeves Effect".

The Geeves Effect is a proposal to construct a walking track to Lake Geeves (below Federation Peak), some sort of associated accommodation within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), and an associated "ecotourism precinct" outside the TWWHA that may provide further accommodation, retail opportunities etc and be a base for other adventure activities. This is described on The Geeves Effect website (www.geeveseffect.com) as follows:

- *To enable high quality walking track access, similar to the Overland Track, to the edge of Lake Geeves, at the base of Australia's highest cliffs (670 metres from Lake Geeves to the summit of Federation Peak).*
- *To create a Wilderness Experience and Accommodation Precinct southwest of Geeveston, outside the World Heritage Area, in the vicinity of the Tahune Airwalk.*
- *A Destination attraction, leveraging off surrounding existing wilderness attractions, that will be the focal point and stimulus for significant accommodation and tourism development investment and regional job creation.*

It is the track to Lake Geeves that is the controversial component of all this. Such a development:

- Is not permitted under the current zoning and associated prescriptions of even the recently-completed pro-development statutory 2016 TWWHA Management Plan,
- Is not being considered by and so falls outside even the State government's controversial EoI process for tourism developments in national parks; and,

- Construction and subsequent use of such a track would have a major negative impact on the wild character of the region, effectively destroying high quality wilderness.

A community meeting at Huonville on The Geeves Effect was held in November 2017 and Grant Dixon and Nick Sawyer from the TNPA went along to hear more about the project proposal. The meeting was hosted by Huon Valley Council Commissioner, Adriana Taylor. It was held to report on the outcomes of the recently-completed Business Case and Demand Study for The Geeves Effect, funded by a $70k grant from the Federal government earlier this year and announced in the media recently, and to promote community interest and support. These documents can be downloaded from the Geeves Effect website.

Overall, about 50 people attended the Huonville meeting, mostly invited community members. The following is derived from meeting notes and a perusal of the aforementioned documents.

Who is pushing the proposal and why?

While the proposal was initiated last year by former-councillor Ken Studley, the Geeves Effect team now comprises 8 or 9 Huon Valley community members and business people. Most of these people attended the Huonville meeting and spoke. All are Huon Valley community members, profess a concern for the current state of the Huon Valley community (re unemployment, aging demographics, etc) and seem to possess a genuine desire to initiate a project (referred to by one speaker as *Wild Huon*) that may address this by 'leveraging' the area's nature-based tourism opportunities to attract more tourists and keep them in the Huon for longer. They claim to have no self-interest or potential to derive personal gain from the project and this seems likely to be true.

There may be political machinations going on, and Senator Eric Abetz facilitated the Federal grant that funded the recently-released business case and demand study, but there was no hint of that at the Huonville meeting.

It was emphasised to the Huonville meeting that The Geeves Effect is and should be a community driven project and as such would be a new model for the evolution and construction of such a development. Some presenters stated there was no need for this process to be "divisive".

Input and involvement was and is invited on the further development of various aspects of the proposal, or (presumably) alternatives. That said, the Business Case and associated Demand Study have obviously used something more concrete as a basis for deriving their numbers.

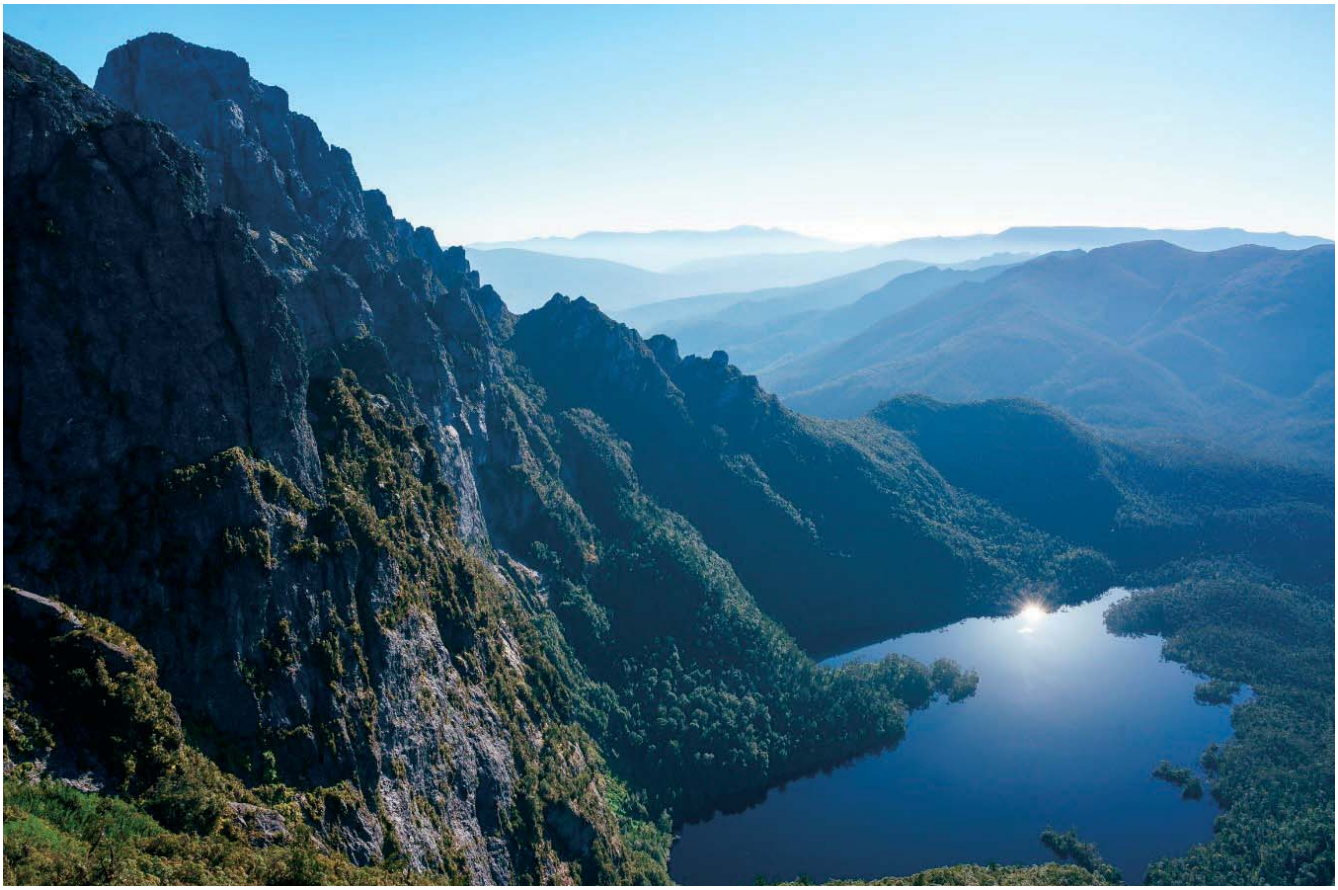
What is proposed?

As mentioned above, there are two components to the Geeves Effect—a walking track to Lake Geeves and an associated ecotourism precinct outside the TWWHA. It is the proposed track to Lake Geeves and associated infrastructure that is of major concern so that is all that is described here. The location of the ecotourism precinct is unspecified but is likely to be somewhere "southwest of Geeveston", and near the Tahune Airwalk has been suggested.

There was repeated emphasis that The Geeves Effect was more a concept than a firm proposal, presumably as a way of inviting the broadest range of ideas from the audience and community (that's how it was presented anyway). That said, there were obvious references to the specifics of the track proposal, and the Business Case document contains some specific information used as a basis of its modelling. According to the Business Case, the proposed Lake Geeves Track would comprise:

- About 20km of new track construction to Lake Geeves. This would comprise some 17.5km more or less following the alignment of the existing rough track from Farmhouse Creek to the base of Moss Ridge (which then continues up Federation Peak) and 2.5km of brand new track from there to the shore of Lake Geeves. The track standard proposed seems to be somewhere between the equivalent of somewhere between the Overland Track and Three Capes Track, and the unit construction costs of a relatively rougher section of the Three Capes Track has been used to estimate the cost of building the Lake Geeves track. The construction cost estimate in the Business Case document is $10.5 million but a figure of $13.8 million was quoted at the Huonville meeting.
- Two overnight accommodation nodes on this track. While the possibility that these might just be complexes of camping platforms was mentioned, the clear preference (and what is modelled in the Business Case) is for huts. These could be "basic" Overland Track style or more salubrious Three Capes style complexes. Hut construction costs are estimated at up to $7 million.
- Annual walker numbers are envisaged to be 10,000 (the same figure used for initial Three Capes Track modelling, and now claimed to be reached although this is controversial). The Business Case also models annual numbers of 12,000 and 5,000, with the latter not considered economically viable.

It was made clear at the Huonville meeting that the track should be publicly-funded infrastructure that would



Lake Geeves is situated in totally wild country at the foot of the southern ramparts of Federation Peak. *Image credit: Grant Dixon*

initiate "The Geeves Effect". There would then be ongoing running costs (maintenance, huts staffing etc) but in theory these would be covered by use fees. The possibility of private commercial operations on the track is also flagged.

The Three Capes Track loomed large in the background of both the Huonville meeting presentations and the Business Case document. Claimed figures on the use and economics of the Three Capes Track are referenced and the style of operation of that development has clearly inspired The Geeves Effect proponents. A skim or read through the Business Case makes this clear. Given there is no transparency regarding the true economics of the Three Capes Track development and operation, and the possible selective use of Three Capes Track data, this is a concern.

Several Huonville meeting audience members hinted or suggested alternative locations for the proposal (although they could also be additional) such as Cockle Creek/Southeast Cape (also within the TWWHA and actually the subject of a recently-announced proposal under the government's EoI scheme for a new commercial track and hut).

Issues and problems

In addition to the fundamental issue that discussion of constructing a high grade track, huts etc to Lake Geeves is being encouraged or allowed to evolve despite being contrary to all current and recently-finalised statutory planning instruments, there are a number of specific concerns:

- "Wilderness" is used as a synonym for a natural area throughout The Geeves Effect proposal documentation. There is seemingly no insight or appreciation of the potential impact of any sort of development such as that proposed on the wild character of the Lake Geeves region, or the concept of wilderness as articulated by even the controversial TWWHA Management Plan. In essence, the proposal argues for providing comfortable access to the "wilderness" for large numbers of visitors but that the wilderness will still be there despite this. The history of self-reliant recreation in the area is acknowledged but it is presumed that improved access will inarguably be better.
- It is acknowledged that there would need to be changes made to the statutory TWWHA Management Plan to allow the project to proceed, that the State and Commonwealth governments, and even UNESCO, would need to be involved or have an interest in this exercise. This is listed as one of the "risks" to

the project in the Business Case. It is true, of course, that there are mechanisms for altering statutory plans etc, and these were outlined at the Huonville meeting. But there was seemingly no appreciation of how controversial this might be in the case of The Geeves Effect. This exacerbates the attitude that planning and legislative instruments are not fixed constraints or guidelines but can be changed to suit the whim of a proponent.

- The proposal is Huon Valley focussed and community-driven, for genuine reasons, but given we are talking about the World Heritage Area, and an area (the Federation Peak precinct) with a considerable profile in the self-reliant wilderness recreation community, it may not be appreciated that the relevant interested community extends well beyond the Huon Valley.
- The lack of an official statewide strategic vision for such nature-based tourism developments is a significant contextual problem. The Tasmanian government's secretive EoI process considering other tourism developments in national parks also does not help. And similarly, the somewhat ad hoc planning and construction responses to visitation issues at places like Cradle Mountain, Freycinet, Bruny Island etc.
- While it has been suggested The Geeves Effect may rival the Three Capes Track as a claimed tourism success story, there remain serious questions regarding the overall economics of that development. Even Tasmanian Tourism Industry Council chief Luke Martin is unenthusiastic about the Geeves Effect proposal, with The Mercury (14 Nov 2017) reporting him saying:

  "It is only a concept for growing visitation into a regional part of Tasmania, not a development proposal. The reality is, key elements of the proposal are not permitted under the new management plan for the TWWHA that was only finalised 12 months ago. We know there are exciting proposals currently before the Government for outstanding new visitor experiences within the World Heritage Area that are permitted under the new management plan. While the Geeves Effect deserved merit, the concept had not been initiated by the tourism industry or the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service."

What next?

The proponents are asking for $2 million to conduct a full feasibility study of The Geeves Effect. Various surveys and studies of the impact on natural and cultural values were foreshadowed as part of this at the Huonville meeting but "wilderness" was notable by its absence.

The Huonville meeting and Huon Valley community generally were invited to comment or offer any other ideas or suggestions that might facilitate the evolution of the project, by contacting The Geeves Effect. You are encouraged to do so, emphasising the negative effect this proposal would have on the wild character of the area makes it unacceptable.

Given that the rationale for this unfortunate proposal is to attract a greater share of tourists to the Huon region, other options that don't degrade the wild lands at the heart of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area should be considered. For example, a network of walk and cycle-ways between towns and natural attractions, supported by facilities in the towns themselves, could provide an authentic countryside/rural experience, spread the multiple community benefits wider, and likely at less cost.

Also consider writing to the usual politicians with the same message, perhaps noting some of the aforementioned planning issues as well.

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Image credit: Nick Sawyer*

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TNPA REPORT

The 20th Annual Buttongrass Ball

Image credit: Dieter Nikolai

As stated on the dance card for the 2017 event: "This ball was founded in 1998 to honour, with a bit of humour, buttongrass and the rest of Tasmania's 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."

The Buttongrass Ball for 2017 had as its theme: *Keep kunanyi /Mt Wellington wild!*

Those of us who live around the foothills of Mt Wellington as well as those who live further away and enjoy having it/her in their view, are all too aware of the threats to kunanyi as we know her—both from greatly increased numbers of visitors as well as from pressure to deface her with a cable car and associated infrastructure, along with the push to construct new walking and mountain bike trails that would 'open up' wild and undisturbed areas.

The dance card, written by Buttongrass Ball organiser and dance caller Dave Wanless and including quotes from *TNPA News*, Spring 2017 issue, reminded dancers of current threats to kunanyi/Mt Wellington.

All who attended the ball had a great time dancing! The dances were collected or composed in Tasmania or known to have been danced in Tasmania pre-1910. Dances included such local specialities as the Tassie Tango, the Pigface Polka and kunanyi!

The TNPA would like to thank the two bands—Hobart Old Time String Band and Reggie Button's Sidesteppers—as well as the Folk Federation of Tasmania, for generously donating the proceeds of the evening to the TNPA. We also thank dance organisers Dave Wanless and Cathy Hutchinson and all the volunteers, who made this such an enjoyable event. And lastly, thank you to the Plants of Tasmania Nursery for lending the potted button grass plants which graced the stage.

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 Grant Dixon, Martin Hawes, Don Knowler, Nick Sawyer. Original articles in TNPA News may be reproduced, but please acknowledge the author and source.

Contributions to TNPA News No.27 are welcome (deadline 29 August 2018). Please send contributions to: info@tnpa.org.au (attention: TNPA News editor).

This newsletter was correct as at 29 March 2018.

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Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Image credit: Nick Sawyer

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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 please email info@tnpa.org.au before attending.

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