

WILDTIMES

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July 2005



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Newsletter of WILDCARE Inc

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WILDCARE TASMANIA NATURE WRITING AWARD 2005

The following story was judged the winner of the WILDCARE Tasmania Nature Writing Award 2005. This year there were two runners-up and their stories will be published in later editions of WILDTIMES.

Congratulations to Mark Tredinnick for this challenging and thought-provoking story.

Days of Christmas

PROLOGUE

Earth has its own old rituals. They visit us, sometimes, in the midst of ours. They come suddenly, violently. Often, where I live, in the Blue Plateau, it's fire that comes at Christmas. Not this year.

These days are sung by coal-black birds.

December in the plateau is the season the black-cockatoos fledge their young. In the days before Christmas, a pair that has nested by our bungalow at the edge of the scarp for as long as I have lived here, and probably much longer, feeds its young one on the cones of the black pines. The three of them strew the ground and batter the jeep with ransacked seedcases, which drop to the ground and lie like exploded grenades.

These birds by my house are the yellowtails, *Calyptorhynchus funereus*. Mourning is their habit. Their cry is an unearthly, world-weary keening. 'Whyla' is what it sounds like, and that was the name the Gundungurra used for them. 'They sing all our grief,' Judith Wright wrote of them. But that is just projection. What they're doing these days of Christmas is weaning their child. They're teaching her to fly. They're making ready to abandon her to the sky above the plateau and whatever fortune she can make.

With a tired kind of grace, with the languid wingbeat that is also their habit, this couple leads its young one, from treetop to treetop—from silvertop ash to pine to peppermint gum to pine—as though they were decking the boughs and ringing the house with song. It's not a happy song. It's more a wail than a wassail. It's an incantation; a spell; a sad kind of carol, singing Christmas in.

I

'So me horse jumps sideways about ten feet,' Jim is saying, turning in his saddle so I can hear him, 'and I hear this thump on the ground behind his back legs. I turn to see the snake gettin' up to have another go. Bloody great brown. Missed again, thank Christ, and Bully gets us the hell out of there.'

It's the week before Christmas. I'm riding with Jim down in the Kanimbla. It's where Jim lives, where he's always lived. 'Kanimbla' means battleground. It'd be a pretty place for a battle. But not today. My elder two children are trailing behind us through the lean scribblygums toward the creek bed. The sky is blue as all eternity.

Summer in the grasslands is the season of the brown snake, the second most poisonous snake the world knows about. Jim's good at finding them, and so far he's been good, or lucky, at eluding them, thanks mostly to horses. But no one's snake-proof. His time may come, though he's not losing sleep worrying about when. He's just telling me one of the stories that makes this valley and his life in it what they are.

This was the brown snake's country long before it was his. Or the horses' or mine. And they defend it like mad. It's good country, though it's dry and getting drier. I'd defend it, too.

Down at the mouth of Butchers Creek, where the snake struck and missed, where Jim and Dave should not really have been riding, but were (they've been riding it all their lives but now it belongs to Sydney Water), Lake Burragorang has fallen so far that the men find a tank, listing in the silt. It should be twenty feet under water, where it's been for fifty years.

But seven years of steady drought all over the plateau—the dam's catchment—have taken half the dam back and left it like this, a diminished thing uncovering its old secrets.

The tank's a relic from the War. They'd have used it, Jim guesses, to snig the timber they felled from the shoulders of the valleyfloor when they dammed the river in the fifties. And then they'd just have left the tank to drown, along with a hundred odd years of pastoral life in the Burratorang, along with a hundred thousand years of Gundungurra grass songs before that. All this so a city on the coast might prosper. Which it has.

But the dam's down below forty percent, where it's never been since it was made. And no one in the city is as worried as they should be. 'I don't know what they think they're going to drink when the water runs out,' says Jim.

Back in the yards, Jim says, 'Got time for a cuppa?' I say I do. He puts on the kettle. As we sip tea, he says, 'sometime we should get you together, with this woman Mary, old Ron Flynn's sister. They grew up in the Burratorang, you prob'ly recall. Mum sees her pretty often in the home where she is now. Judith and I went along the other day, to see her for Christmas, you know. You mention any place in the Valley, this creek, that ridge, that river bend, and Mary knows who lived there, who they married, when they died. It's all gone now, but Mary, she hasn't forgotten anything, all these years.'

Someone ought to get those stories down, I say, before she goes and takes them with her; before her life ebbs and they're lost for keeps.

The weather's changing. Out in the paddocks and in the trees at the foot of the escarpment, the wind is getting big. It's coming hard out of the south. It bangs the gates against the rails of the yards outside; it sets the shed quaking around us. The kids are looking nervous. 'Better close that door,' Jim says, getting up, 'before this thing takes off.'

II

We come up from the city to our house in Katoomba on the day before the day before Christmas. Daniel, our baby, starts screaming at Penrith, halfway here, and he has hardly stopped since. This is how it's been for a month. I go the pharmacy in town and get something for colic. It seems to work. Or something does. He finally stops wailing at nine and sleeps. We wrap some presents and put them under the tree. We follow Daniel to bed.

That night, Maree's recurring dream recurs. She wakes and tells me on the morning of Christmas Eve that a tidal wave took her in the night.

III

Macquarie Island's a long way from Katoomba. It's the northern end of the Macquarie Ridge, which runs under the ocean like a long scar tissue from New Zealand to the edge of Antarctica. It is where the Pacific plate is grinding anticlockwise against, and slipping beneath, the Australian plate. Macquarie Ridge is the contusion these two contending plates gives rise to, and it's rising a couple of millimetres each year. Macquarie Island's the bit of it—a piece of the ocean crust pushed up by the dirty dancing of the continental plates—that made it above sea level. It did that only recently: six hundred thousand years ago or so. It's a new land. And it's a long way from finished.

It was two in the morning of Christmas Eve when an earthquake shuddered the Macquarie Ridge five hundred kilometres south of the island, close to where the ridge runs into a third plate—the Antarctic. Not one of the staff of the Australian Antarctic Division on Macquarie Island stirred in their slumber. No seismic waves swept over Tasmania, though buildings on that island shook for a full fifteen seconds. But thousands of kilometres north by northwest, Maree was swept away in her sleep.

Earthquakes loose themselves along the Macquarie Ridge every other year. They are its recurring dream. The ridge is one of the margins along which the earth is remaking itself. It's one of the places where the mobility of the earth's surface is manifest; where plate tectonics can be observed in the wild. But it's a long way from anywhere. An earthquake near Macquarie Island is no one's idea of news. This one should have been, though.

Something big—a quake of 7.5 or more on the Richter scale—can be counted on every other decade along the ridge. But this one on the morning of Christmas Eve was the largest earthquake there since 1924; and, at 8.1, it was the largest earthquake anywhere since one that killed a hundred people in Peru in 2001. It was larger than the quake that destroyed Bam in Iran on Boxing Day 2003. Had it happened under Sydney, the city would have fallen to the ground. Had it happened in the plateau, our cottage would have ended up on the floor of the valley.

As it happened, nothing happened. Not yet. The earth went on revolving without losing a beat. Christmas Eve dawned on the plateau. And Maree was washed up on its shore.



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IV

Six storms roll over us that afternoon. They sweep across the plateau from the southwest. The sky congeals and blackens in heavy winds and lets loose heavy showers of rain. Between storms, I hear the birds keening, but Daniel's keeping fairly quiet. His brother's asleep, but the little bloke's raging against the dying of the light, so, when I think the weather's cleared, I put him in the Bjørn and walk him up the drive and out onto our street. I mean to walk him asleep in the arms of the afternoon, and he surrenders almost as soon as I leave the house. His head drops against my chest, but I carry on.

I walk straight into the heaviest and suddenest storm of them all, and I have to run for shelter under the awnings of the new house that's going up on the corner. Daniel sleeps through the din, and through the rougher music of my running, right through the cold, hard drops of rain that hit us like shot. I stand under the fierce percussion the afternoon makes upon the awning, and I watch how much water courses the roof, spills the eaves, floods the downpipes on its way to the stormwater drains and, in time, to the valley. This is an inundation. It'll help the dam rise again, enough to retake Jim's tank.

The rain that falls in the half hour I pace here with my sleeping child would keep this house in water for a couple of months—not that they're catching it. That's an old habit we've lost and need to recall. The rain eases back. I wait for it to fall away to nothing, but it comes on again, heavier. The next time it fades, I run for home. Who knows when this might end?

V

On Christmas Day, I miss my exit. We're making for mum and dad's on the motorway. I take the next exit and backtrack past the university. I point out to Maree where six lanes of traffic now run where Christie Park once slept, where I spent my childhood playing soccer inside the circle of the sandy trotting track and the scribblygums that hemmed it all in. This place was not especially important to me, but because of its effacement, I find myself able to understand the grief that others feel when their homeplaces are drowned or burned, or blown to bits or swept away; when the face of the earth is altered and somewhere becomes nowhere. I find myself saying this, this Christmas day in the morning.

VI

Boxing Day. It's a year since Bam fell and thirty thousand people died. I don't remember that until later. Today is the first day of the Melbourne Test Match. For twenty-five years there's always been the Boxing Day Test, and I'm watching bits of it on the television, when I am not being pulled outside by Henry to help him discover our garden and the path through the banksias and gums to the valley beyond.

This year we're playing Pakistan. The sky is blue in Melbourne—that's not traditional; that's a miracle. Cricket is a game in which almost anything can happen at any moment and usually doesn't. And then, suddenly, it does. That's its genius, which it's showing off again this Boxing

Day in Melbourne. In cricket, the real game is going on, and it's always going on, tides are turning, between balls, beneath the surface, when nothing appears to be happening at all. Like geophysics; like plate tectonics.

Two minutes before noon, getting on for lunch at the MCG, the earth trembles. Not that we noticed at the time. How is it that this oblate spheroid, the earth, can be shaken so hard it shudders from its axis as it spins and the day loses three microseconds of its length right there, and yet the trajectory of a cricket ball in Melbourne and the concentration of one man watching it in Katoomba are unaffected? The Australia plate is on the move again. But what it does this time makes the Macquarie Ridge quake look like a Sunday School picnic, like a game of cricket.

In this moment, just before eight in the morning local time, something happens that would normally take three hundred years. Along a 1200 kilometre front, the leading edge of the Australia plate slips fifteen metres under the Burma plate. The seabed on the north side of this subduction shoots up ten metres in an instant. It is a violent movement of the earth, radical and massive. Its epicentre lies just west of the northern tip of Sumatra. Islands nearby shift twenty metres north; the northern tip of Sumatra travels thirty-six metres in a split second. They feel it in Aceh and Java; they feel it way up in Thailand. As well they might. This is the fourth largest earthquake ever recorded on earth. Seismological instruments in North America, where it is still Christmas Day, measure it at 9.0 (that's almost ten times stronger than the Macquarie Ridge quake.)

But the sudden subduction, as these scientists know, is just the beginning. Such a rending of the crust under the ocean is tsunamigenic, as I heard an Australian geophysicist put

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later. Such a shock makes seismic waves that cross oceans at hundreds of miles an hour; that breach coastlines with a force and amplitude correlative to the violent subsidence of the earth's crust that got the wave going in the first place. One dictionary of geographical terms I have sitting here on my desk says this:

Tsunamis travel for considerable distances across the sea (the wave length may be over 100 kilometres...) As the tsunami approaches the shore, the wave height increases markedly, and sometimes exceeds fifteen metres; it is thus capable of causing immense destruction to coastal settlements and severe loss of life. For example, the great Krakatoa eruption of 1883,

associated with seismic disturbances, caused tsunamis that drowned 36, 000 people in coastal villages of Java and Sumatra.—Witherick et al, A Modern Dictionary of Geography

The world and Witherick's dictionary are just about to get themselves a more shocking example. What follows clearfells whole Sumatran villages; it claims three hundred thousand souls; it travels all the way to the coast of Africa, four thousand kilometres from where it began.

VII

The moon is full that night. And the ocean, under that brilliant pure moon, is calm again. Along the shores of that ocean—Aceph, the Nicobar and Andaman Islands, Phuket, southern Burma, the east coast of India south of Chennai, eastern Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Mogadishu in Somalia—250, 000 people lie dead and dying, a thousand coastal settlements, villages and slums, tourist resorts and minor cities, lie wrecked like a vast defeated fleet. Three

million people have no homes to go to or families to go to them with. None of them knows yet that they are part of such a vast, oceanic company. No one has yet imagined that the loss they have suffered, the horror they have survived, has been so widely shared. You would not think a wave could stretch so far. Only the moon would see the pattern of which they are all a part.

The tsunami is spent, but the story it makes, the tragedy it tells, are only just breaking on the shores of our consciousness.

The afternoon of the next day, I walk with my friend Roland into a burned heathland above the place they call the Landslide, where the escarpment gave way in January 1931 and slid into the valley, demonstrating just how the deep valleys of the upper mountains got to look the way they do. Charles Darwin stood near here in 1836 and thought that the ocean must have flooded these valleys to make them look this way. But this is one place the ocean never came and is never likely to. The landslide, from the plateau's point of view, was nothing out of the ordinary. This is how the cliffs retreat. This is how they turn themselves into a valley and, in time, a plain. This is another way the earth remakes itself. But up here, it's an event we're only just getting over.

Roland has been painting out here lately. Everything you want to get hold of—and never can—about the plateau is here: ironstone sculptures, ochre scarps, the plunge to dense grey-green woodlands, the elusive bulk of Solitary, the indomitable amplitude, the blueness of the very air. And today it's all gathered here under a cloudless cobalt sky in which the winds storm. We find it hard to stand. The wind, rushing up out of the valley, is pushing us back. We can barely hear each other speak.

Where the grasses grow up out of the blackened ground, I find these delicate flowers, which in all the world grow only here on these few escarpments in the sandstone plateaux. The pink flannel flower comes up only briefly and only when the plateau gets its litany of fire and wind and following rain just right. As it has these past eighteen months. It's a blessing to find the flower, and to know what it tells you. This is one small way the plateau celebrates what it is. It's how it remembers.

A week later Roland sends me a birthday card he's made from a drawing he sketched near where we floundered in the wind. His valley floor is so alive, it looks like the sea's broken in.

VIII

Days pass. Off Sumatra and up into the Bay of Bengal the ocean bed is hectic with aftershocks. The plates are bedding themselves down. The body of the earth is not still. It never is—particularly here. But the sky above is calm and clear, and so's the angry sea.

Each day, in the bright blue western sky of morning, my son Henry finds the same moon, reduced a little more and a little more, until it is, after a week, a ghost of itself, a slender crescent. It is the same moon, of course, that looks down on the dead and the displaced; but my boy has as little idea of the horror the moon joins him in, as does the moon herself. The moon, going about her monthly ritual of birth and death above us all on

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our tremulous planet, can still cause him joy. That's no comfort to anyone, I guess. But it tells us that gladness and terror coexist every moment in the world, under sun and moon. It's not that the earth, its restless plates and ocean waves, don't care; it's not that they hate us. It's that what becomes of each of us is just an example of what the world is—each tear and smile, each life and death is part of its natural history.

Each day in the plateau we wake to sunshine, to beatific days that are dreaming up another drought, and we wake to news that the toll has risen by a factor of ten. Apart from grieving and giving, it's hard to know what to do or what to think. One had never imagined that an event so enormous, that annihilation on such a scale, so thorough and so swift, was possible without some human agency. One is subject to the world, after all. One's time will come. But what, in particular, does a man say who spends his days asking whoever will listen to remember the natural world; to remember it in our politics and prose, and in our daily lives? This was not the world he had in mind. No, this was part of it. But it is, of course, the very last thing he wished the world to do. To do to these people.

In Melbourne the test match runs on. On its third day, the players run black tape around their white sleeves, about their upper arms. It is a sign of mourning, a mark of respect. In Galle in southwest Sri Lanka, there is a cricket stadium that looks now like a tip. Its grass has been blasted away, its stands stolen. Car bodies, an overturned bus, sheets of tin, corpses and the branches of trees are strewn about the decimated circle of it. A few months ago in a test match on this ground, the leg-spinner Shane Warne took a wicket and broke a world record. There is no reason at all why the tsunami might not have rolled into Galle that day, rather than on these days of Christmas, when Warne is bowling in Melbourne. And he knows it. It's what his armband says, among other things.

By the fourth day, the estimates of the dead have jumped to over a hundred thousand. A journalist walks with his cameraman along the south coast of Aceh in northern Sumatra and finds the ruins of a village, where once ten thousand people lived, where now just one man remains. Here the waves, which elsewhere swept five and even fifteen kilometres inland because the land let them, pushed fifty metres up the limestone cliffs behind the town, swamping it, and then rushed back out to sea, taking the town and its people with them. This happened twice. Nothing is left that could be called a town.

In Northern Sumatra, survivors, refugees now, stumble toward the capital Banda Aceh, where the sea became a black river, pulled the city apart and dragged it, broiling, seething, through the streets and ruins, and where now hundreds of bloated corpses float in the harbour with broken boats and sewage and the roofs of temples; where disease and wreckage and the rich smell of tropical death wait for the flood of

refugees that's coming this way. Two-thirds of the people the ocean killed (over one-hundred thousand of them when counting stopped) it killed here, in Aceh province. Their homeland was the first thing in the waves' path. An independent people struggling for its freedom, a fishing people, a fervent, warring people, they've made the mistake of loving since time began, and inhabiting, this contentious ground where three tectonic plates converge. It's nobody's fault. We do not choose our homelands. They choose us.

More stories reach us now, more than we can handle. It's a miscellany of misery: the boys playing cricket on the beach at Chennai, taken by the first wave, scattered and lost; the Indonesian mother who has to choose which of her children to let slip so that she can stay afloat with the other; the Indian Tamil who drops his three-year-old son when the wave dumps them, and then watches the retreating water drag his small son away to sea, arms still reaching for his father.

Just to avoid the usual cliché, let me say, the waves did not come without warning. The animals seemed to know what was coming. Dogs refused to walk their usual walk on the beach. A day before, the monkeys disappeared from the temple by the beach in Sri Lanka, and the elephants took to higher ground in a wildlife refuge where, the next day seventy tourists were overwhelmed. The birds fell silent. Though we are animals, too, of course, it's been a long time since most of us tuned in to the frequencies the other animals still pick up—or to the animals themselves. Besides the warnings the animals gave, there was the very last warning from the sea herself. Not that this warning did much good either: it was too cryptic; it gave no one much time; and there was nowhere much to run, even if you were fast enough. On the beaches on Boxing Day morning, a couple of larger than average waves washed in and surged higher than you'd have expected. Then they were sucked back fast, leaving, in some places, a kilometre of sand exposed, where there had only ever been water before. Only the wisest and most cautious souls could resist



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the impulse then to stay and look at the flapping fish and the wet desert the ocean had left behind. And that's where most people were when the seismic waves surged in, turbid, loud and terrible. And people ran then, but mostly it was too late.

It was an Old Testament moment, a fabled, horrid, otherworldly occurrence, utterly natural and yet apocalyptic—enough to make one believe in hell, if not in heaven, if one had the time. But it was neither; it was just the earth at work.

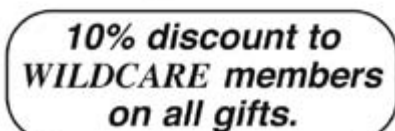
The ocean took them all—Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, rich man, poor man, scientist, thief; pantheist and materialist; the old, the young, particularly the young, the men and the women, particularly the women; it took them all without ceremony.

The fathomless sadness of each of these stories, any one of which in normal times might break your heart, gets lost in the flood of others – tens of thousands of other tragedies just like it – that makes a crescent half way around the world on Boxing Day 2004.

IX

On the fourth day of Christmas an economist in Washington DC suggests the tsunamis could be a good thing for the afflicted countries. There's normally a bit of a boost for battered economies in a reconstruction phase. There's a fisherman on a Sri Lankan beach, among his ruined nets and family, among the swelling corpses that were his friends and the flotsam that was his village; I'm looking at a photograph of this man, and it doesn't seem like the good news from DC has reached him. I don't think he's realized that his stocks are about to rise.

But that's economics for you: human life stripped of humanity and life and graphed. Someone's already graphed the tsunami effect. Those are waves the markets understand.



X

In Melbourne, the test match ends one day short of its term. It was an unequal contest. Another begins, four days later, on my birthday. This is the season, in my life, of births and celebrations; it is the season, in my land, of cricket and its slow, old rituals.

There is only one mournful cry now in the tall trees about the house. The black cockatoos have abandoned their child. They have let her go, as they always do about now, as nature insists, and they have gone where I guess they always go to get on with their own life together. Next September, the sky-gods willing, they'll be back, and this girl will be gone on to her fortune. Just for now, she's lost, and she's telling anyone who'll listen. She doesn't know how lucky she is.

A week has passed since the earthquake. They've stopped counting the dead. They're hurrying to bury them now, without as much dignity as they have time to afford. The HMAS Kanimbla—a battleship named for a valley, a valley named for a battleground, a valley I love in this plateau where I live—is deployed to Aceh to help with the living and the dead. It goes in peace. Many others go in peace, too. There is something to be said for wealth—and the economics that propagates it—at a time like this. Without it, there could be no helicopters and water-purification systems, no portable hospitals and food-drops and communication systems, there could be no such unprecedented tide of giving. It might also be said, of course, that the poverty of the tsunami's victims is the price they pay for our wealth. So we are only giving them, too late, what we have already taken.

Still, the world is marshalling. It is amazing how much sadness the rest of us in the richer regions of the earth, on our more competent geologies, can bear; how much grieving we can do, how many special reports we can sit through on television, how much money we can donate, how much help we can render without any noticeable decline in our living standards, without much risk to our prosperity. There may be a lesson here. I wonder if we can learn to live generously. Can we give away more of ourselves, more of our personal security—can we make sacrifice an everyday practice, like prayer? Can we live givingly, instead of waiting for disaster and then giving, when it is too late and when no amount of giving is enough, in a paroxysm that is equal parts pity and shame?

There's another lesson we're sure to forget: Earth is terrible, is violent, is beautiful. She is all we have, and this is how she works. It's good to remember that we live on such an Earth. It is good to be humble in the face of that knowledge and mindful of the grace that keeps one alive for now. For there are so many ways to die. Nature knows enough of them. And we keep thinking up more.

Each of us is only here till the ocean comes to take us back where we all began. So, let's stand in awe of this wild world, still deciding who it wants to be. Let's mourn the dead and give thanks that we are not among them yet; let's give until it hurts; let's do our work and get on with living—which is so much harder to do than dying.



XI

On the eighth day of Christmas an archbishop in Sydney tells his flock that the tsunamis are God's judgment upon the human race. So how does that go again? Of all the people up to no good in the world I would have thought the poor folk of the Indian Ocean weren't high on the list. Even the tourists who were taken too were probably guilty of nothing much more than wealth and a little sloth. God's aim must not be what it used to be, or perhaps he was just lashing out.

I'm not sure God needs such sanctimony anymore, though he could do with a little target practice.

XII

On the eighth day of Christmas, on the way to friends on Dargan Ridge, I stop at the Mt Boyce lookout, on a whim of some kind. I stand and look down at the Kanimbla, and it takes me a minute or more to work out that I'm looking down at Jim's place, his big green shed, the yards beside them and the house behind. This valley, which I know pretty well and claim to love, is not the same place at all from up here. This country continues to baffle and elude me. It changes its shape. It keeps becoming something else, a place I had never imagined. The world is not the place I thought I knew.

EPILOGUE

These days are strung on the plainsong of sad black birds.

These days walk their stations; they chant in plangent voice a liturgy, dreadful, violent, delicate and holy.

Listening to these birds, I find it hard to say, at first, what there is left to celebrate, what there is left to hope for, out of what the world has done, these days of Christmas. But they make mourning an art, they make it a way of life, they make it beautiful, these elegant birds in their sad raiment. So might I, if I had half their grace.

So let my work, in its voice, and my living in its gestures, recall each of these lives lost—each one a gift, each one a miracle, each one beautiful, each one as precious to the man or woman or child who lived it, and to their loved ones, as my children's lives are to me. Let it honour the power, the dignity and mystery of the moving world. Let me be thankful that I live on a stable bit of ground, a still point. Let me never forget—if I may steal an idea from a poet—that the earth is just a slower sort of ocean, and that each day I wake to find the ground where I left it the day before—that is cause for celebration.

Places do not stand still. Creation is not over; and creation entails loss. The world is never finished becoming what it needs to be. Let me know that; let me celebrate the dynamism of the earth; let me take part in it; and let me watch my step.

Listening to these birds, this is what I think they sing: Fledge your young, if you are lucky and still have them; teach them to sing and move with grace, and let them go. Care for them till then: they will have to do better what we've done badly. Let yourself be moved, suddenly, profoundly, not by fear, but by the same thing that moves the earth. Go down deep into the earth toward your centre. Let yourself be broken by the plight of others. Give. Give in to the earth. Mourn. And make your days a loose kind of ceremony of quiet – even sometimes-raucous – gratitude for the unsteady ground below and the unsteadier sky above. And give thanks for each other, past and present.

Oh, and don't trust the water. There always seems to be too much or too little of it.

'I couldn't imagine the mountain as a/ slower kind of river' writes James Galvin in 'What Holds Them Apart,' God's Mistress, in Resurrection Update, 1997. My 'still point' samples another great poet, T S Eliot (his 'Burnt Norton'). And my earlier allusion to 'raging against the dying of the light' employs the third verse of Dylan Thomas's great villanelle, 'Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night'. I cannot help hearing such incantatory lines. But it is right to thank the artists who heard and sang them first. 🙏

By: Mark Tredinnick

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New Editor for WILDTIMES

Kylie Bevan and husband Rod joined WILDCARE when they moved to Tasmania in 2002. Avid bushwalkers, they saw membership as an excellent way to support an organisation committed to caring for Tasmania's treasures - its wild places, wildlife and cultural heritage.



With the arrival of daughter Emily last September, Kylie became a stay-at-home mum, and aims to wear her editor hat during Emily's naps. And given that Emily loves the outdoors, with many weekend hours spent in a toddler backpack, Rod and Kylie also hope to assist Friends of Trevallyn, an area they consider to be their big backyard. 🐾

NEW Discount Offer from Parks and Wildlife Service

PWS has generously increased the discount on Annual Park Passes being offered to WILDCARE Inc members, in recognition of the enormous amount of volunteer work members contribute each year.

The discount offered has been increased from \$20 to \$25 and applies to all forms of Annual Park Passes - full rate, concession rate and the special two-year rate.

Type of Annual Park Pass	Standard rate	WILDCARE member rate
<i>New Purchase (1 Nov – 30 Apr)</i>		
One year	\$84.00	\$59.00
One year - concession	\$67.20	\$42.20
Two years	\$108.00	\$83.00
Two years - concession	\$86.40	\$61.40
<i>Renewal (anytime) or New Purchase (1 May – 31 Oct)</i>		
One year	\$60.00	\$35.00
One year - concession	\$48.00	\$23.00
Two years	\$108.00	\$83.00
Two years - concession	\$86.40	\$61.40

To claim the discount on the Annual Park Pass you will need to have membership that is valid at the time of purchase, so either:

- quote your current WILDCARE membership number on the Annual Park Pass Form when you get a reminder in the mail from PWS,
- present your membership card at Service Tasmania or Park Visitor Centre at the time of purchasing the Annual Park Pass, or
- simply attach a WILDCARE membership form and payment to your Annual Park Pass Form if you need to renew your WILDCARE membership or join up for the first time.

Membership forms will be sent out with all Annual Park Pass renewal forms to make it more convenient to renew your membership, if you have forgotten to at the end of December each year. And of course WILDCARE Inc includes membership forms in WILDTIMES that can be used to renew your membership before it expires at the end of December.

The Board of Management encourages all WILDCARE Inc members to promote WILDCARE Inc by encouraging people who are interested in volunteering for natural and cultural heritage conservation and reserve management, or supporting volunteers doing that work, to become members.

The Board of Management also thanks Peter Mooney (General Manager PWS) and PWS staff for their prompt and effective response to the issue of membership numbers with this increase in discount and inclusion of the WILDCARE Inc membership form in their mail-outs. It very much demonstrates the depth and strength of the partnership between PWS and WILDCARE Inc. 🐾

By: Richard Hammond, Co-Chair (Elected)

WILDTIMES publication schedule

Issue #	Article Submissions Due	Publication Date
26	31 Sep 2005	Oct 2005
27	30 Nov 2005	Dec 2005
28	31 Jan 2006	Feb 2006

Publication dates are subject to receiving a sufficient number of articles to allow publishing to go ahead.

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Dear Wildcarers,

I thought it important to write to you in regard to a matter raised in the last newsletter - the issue of the alarming drop in *WILDCARE* Inc membership numbers. Since being brought to my attention this has been the subject of a number of discussions between the *WILDCARE* Co-Chairs and myself. The District Volunteer Facilitators, Community Partnerships staff, staff of the Visitor Services Branch and members of the *WILDCARE* Inc Board of Management have all been addressing particular aspects of this issue.

The Parks and Wildlife Service recognises the absolutely outstanding and invaluable work that members do to assist us in managing the natural and cultural heritage within Tasmania's Reserve system right around the State. We also recognise that members contribute enormous efforts to natural and cultural heritage conservation in partnership with the Resource Management and Conservation Division of DPIWE.

Through the various discussions a number of likely causes for the drop in membership have been identified and are being addressed as rapidly as possible.

It seems clear that the removal of the option to join *WILDCARE* Inc and purchase an Annual Park Pass on the one form, at the one time, has proved to be a significant inconvenience for many people – sufficient to discourage them from joining *WILDCARE* Inc. We have therefore decided to enclose a *WILDCARE* membership form in the Annual Park Pass renewal notice envelope. This means that in order to claim your discount you will be able to either quote your current membership number or if you need to renew your expired *WILDCARE* membership, complete the *WILDCARE* membership form and attach it, with payment, to the Annual Park Pass Renewal Form. Once PWS has processed your discounted Annual Park Pass, your *WILDCARE* membership form and payment will be passed onto *WILDCARE* Inc to be entered into the member database.

Andrew Smith and Chris Leitch from Community Partnerships in DPIWE have had extensive discussions with the PWS Volunteer Facilitators about issues that have been generated by OHS and insurance requirements. They have also highlighted the need to support and encourage existing social networks (ie community groups and programs) rather than create new and less effective lists of volunteers.

While it is not possible to fully remove the new registration processes related to OHS and insurance, the emphasis will change to us registering only those people who are actually going to come and give a hand on a project. We will look to our partner community organisations to hold membership records for those people who want to be involved at some future date.

Obviously the *WILDCARE* Inc Membership Register and the 35 *WILDCARE* groups supporting reserves, and the network of Coastcare groups, are our largest volunteer networks, and the relationship with these networks must continue to be a strong one. We will therefore be ensuring that individuals who wish to get involved and hear about future projects are encouraged to join with an existing group, relevant to their interests and preferred location. The volunteer facilitators will then go to those existing groups when we have projects that we need volunteer assistance with and that may interest their members. And in light of the partnerships we have with these networks we would be hoping that the groups approach us with ideas and projects that can be undertaken jointly.

All community groups will be given the opportunity to register as a partner volunteer organisation if they would like to be included in this type of partnership.

The discount offered to *WILDCARE* members when purchasing an Annual Park Pass has been reviewed. The discount offer has remained the same since 1997. Over the same period the cost of an Annual Park pass has changed. In recognition of the enormous value of the volunteer work provided by *WILDCARE* Inc members, and to encourage more people to become *WILDCARE* volunteers we have decided to increase the discount from \$20 to \$25. This discount applies to all categories of Annual Park Pass. These new rates are shown elsewhere in this newsletter.

The above changes will be operational no later than September 1st this year, meaning that they will apply to all members rejoining, or joining for the first time, for 2006.

Finally, I would like to thank *WILDCARE* Inc, its Board of Management and its members for the extraordinary level of support you provide. I encourage all members to promote *WILDCARE* Inc and its activities to friends so that we can once again see a vibrant large membership of *WILDCARE* Inc. Our natural and cultural heritage and our very special reserves depend on it.

Yours sincerely

Peter Mooney

General Manager

Parks and Wildlife Service.



Major decisions and outcomes from recent Board of Management meetings

Meeting 09/06/05 – held at Lands Building

- Andrew advised we had found a new Honorary Treasurer - Amanda Winter from the Derwent Avenue Group. Welcome aboard, Amanda;
- Richard advised it was unlikely our DGR status would be ratified by the end of the financial year, as originally indicated by the Commonwealth;
- The Board agreed to consider the introduction of a two-year membership, in line with the two-year Parks Pass, as one

means of addressing falling membership (see separate article in this issue);

- The Board agreed to issue a permanent invitation to the five Regional Volunteer Co-ordinators to attend Board Meetings as observers. It is not expected that they all will be able to attend every meeting;
- Andrew reported on the progress of discussions with PWS on the falling membership (see separate article in this issue);

• Funding applications:

- Lockable storage cabinets for Friends of Lillico Penguins. Approved funding of \$2054.80
- Data Projector for the Tamar Island Wetlands Visitor Centre. Approved funding of \$2528.00

However, as a direct result of declining membership, purchase is deferred until adequate funds are available. 🐾

By: Richard Hammond, Co-Chair (Elected)

Community Action in Reserves (CAREs) groups

What is a CAREs group?

A CAREs or 'Friends of' group is created within WILDCARE Inc when a number of WILDCARE Inc members interested in a specific reserve, or activity, decide to join together to work more closely with Reserve Managers (usually Rangers) or Nature Conservation staff.

To be recognised as a WILDCARE Inc CAREs group:

- all members of the group must be WILDCARE Inc members, only WILDCARE Inc members are recognised as members of the group; and
- there must be at least five members.

What do CAREs groups do?

We have over 30 such groups now:

- supporting particular reserves (eg Friends of Mt Field and Friends of Kate Reed);
- staffing visitor centres and museums (eg Tamar Island Wetlands Centre CAREs and Low Head Maritime Museum Support group);
- caring for wildlife (eg North East Wildlife Carers and North West Wildlife Rescue); and
- providing community education (eg Friends of Lillico Penguins and the three Fishcare Chapters).

What are the benefits of being a WILDCARE Inc CAREs group?

Because the CAREs group is formed within the WILDCARE Inc structure (called a Branch in the Constitution), the group receives the benefits of being part of an incorporated group, while maintaining a level of operational autonomy. Yet, compared with other 'stand alone' groups, it has a reduced level of red tape to deal with.

Benefits include:

- the group president has a seat on the WILDCARE Inc Board of Management;
- CAREs groups can call for assistance from all members of WILDCARE Inc;
- CAREs groups can apply for an internal grant for small projects (up to \$2500);
- CAREs members may be eligible for various rewards for effort;
- CAREs groups are eligible to apply to the Tasmanian Landcare Association managed grant program for assistance with administration costs (\$500pa);
- CAREs groups can apply for NHT, Envirofund and other community grant programs;
- as WILDCARE Inc is incorporated, and the CAREs group is part of WILDCARE Inc, the CAREs group does not need to become incorporated independently;
- CAREs groups already have a Constitution – that of WILDCARE Inc;
- WILDCARE Inc has Public Liability insurance and Volunteer accident

insurance that cover the WILDCARE activities of the group when they are not working with PWS. The CAREs president has the authority to approve CAREs group projects as WILDCARE projects;

- WILDCARE Inc has an ABN – therefore so do the CAREs groups;
- WILDCARE Inc is registered for GST – therefore so are the CAREs groups;
- WILDCARE Inc does the BAS report – so groups do not have to;
- WILDCARE Inc has a bank account – therefore so have the groups;
- WILDCARE Inc hold funds for groups and make payments on their instructions;
- WILDCARE Inc is audited annually, so groups do not need to be;
- WILDCARE Inc can organise mailouts to CAREs group members;
- WILDCARE Inc holds and manages the membership list, including those of CAREs groups, so groups do not need to keep separate records;
- WILDCARE Inc has a quarterly newsletter WILDTIMES – CAREs groups should treat WILDTIMES as their newsletter and submit articles, notices, requests for help, stories etc as they wish. WILDTIMES is sent to all members;
- WILDCARE Inc has a website – www.wildcareas.org.au – each group can have a special page dedicated to promoting their group. CAREs groups can also submit notices about working bees, meetings and special events to go on the Bulletin Board on the website.



How to form a CAREs group

1. Call a meeting of interested members through a mailout by the WILDCARE Office, or in WILDTIMES. Promote the meeting locally inviting others to come along and join the group. Include the reserve managers/Rangers in the organisation and running of the meeting;
2. At the meeting, discuss with the Ranger and members possible assistance that might be provided, possible projects, interests of potential members and about the partnership that is integral to the process;
3. At the meeting, select a president, secretary and treasurer;
4. Complete 'Operating Guidelines for WILDCARE groups' (on the web site under 'Forms'). Send the completed Guidelines form, along with the names of the elected office bearers to the WILDCARE Inc Office, c/- GPO Box 44 Hobart 7001; and
5. Provide the names of the WILDCARE Inc members to the WILDCARE Office (office@wildcarea.org.au) so that their records can be updated to include

membership of the new group.

What about being an affiliated group?

Affiliating a group with WILDCARE Inc is completely different to being a WILDCARE Inc CAREs group. An affiliated group is an external, independent group that would like to be associated and maybe work with WILDCARE Inc in some way. If you are a WILDCARE Inc CAREs group you do not need to then affiliate with WILDCARE Inc.

It costs just \$25 to affiliate a group – equivalent to an individual membership cost. Therefore the group receives similar benefits to an individual member.

Affiliation provides:

- a communication channel to the group to let them know about events and working bees that their members may be interested in attending;
- WILDTIMES is sent to up to three addresses to assist with this, and working bee notices are sent to the group (according to interests noted on the membership form); and
- if affiliated group members attend a working bee organised and led

by WILDCARE Inc then they will be covered by WILDCARE's insurances.

Affiliation does not provide individual WILDCARE membership for members of the affiliated group.

Affiliation does not provide insurance cover for activities and events organised by that group independently of WILDCARE Inc authorisation.

To become affiliated, a group completes the usual membership form and pays \$25pa.

What if our group is not a WILDCARE Inc CAREs group and is not affiliated, but there are a number of WILDCARE members in our membership?

Given the large number of WILDCARE Inc members around the State, many groups will have members who hold membership of WILDCARE Inc. No benefits are conferred or transferred to a group simply because some of its members also hold membership of WILDCARE Inc. Further, these individuals are not covered by WILDCARE Inc insurance when they are working on a project led by the group, or working independently of WILDCARE Inc authorisation processes. 🧑🏻‍🌾

Volunteer Opportunities with PWS in the South

I'm back at PWS Huonville for a couple of weeks in a slightly modified role and am able to advise of some opportunities for WILDCARE members to get involved in various projects over the next few months. If you are interested in any of these projects please call or email – I cannot guarantee places, but I can get you the latest information.

Maatsuyker Island Weeding Program

Friends of Maatsuyker Island are proposing to visit the island again in November 2005 to continue their Envirofund-supported weed control program. The project team have had success in controlling large infestations of blackberry and montbretia (see Wildtimes Issue 23 and this issue) and have started work on previously unrecorded but well established patches of Hebe elliptica. November's trip will continue the good work. Places on these trips are eagerly sought after – if you're interested, but not on the mailing list, please give me a call.

Melaleuca Volunteer Caretaker Program

We are still reviewing last season's program but early indications are that we will be running the program again next summer. The program calls for pairs of volunteers to spend about two weeks at Melaleuca providing mainly a visitor information service for the large range of visitors to the Melaleuca Visitor Service Site. Again, places on this program are limited, so please call if you want information.

Bruny Island

Perhaps not as exotic or remote as Melaleuca or Maatsuyker Island, but definitely more accessible. I am working with local ranger Bernard Edwards on a program which will provide opportunities for volunteers to assist with cultural heritage management at the Bruny Island Quarantine Station and weed control at the spectacular Cape Queen Elizabeth. If these projects interest you, keep an eye on WILDCARE's web based bulletin board and call-up notices, or give me a call. 🧑🏻‍🌾

By: Craig Saunders, PWS Huonville
Phone 6264 8463 or email Craig.
Saunders@parks.tas.gov.au

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Group Reports

Friends of the Kent Group National Park

Deal Island Working Bee Report May 2005

Extended stay

The crew returned home on Friday 3 June, 21 days after their arrival on Deal Island. Bass Strait weather lived up to its reputation and delivered continuously strong westerly winds and high seas from 22 May to 2 June, preventing boat transport getting to the island. Food was eked out to last the extended stay, combined with supplies left over from previous trips (and kept for emergencies), and the generous assistance of caretakers Mary, Polly and family who lent us a wide variety of food. We were able to replace this when we were picked up. Our diet was further supplemented by several catches of abalone, a few fish and two fresh rabbits. Many of us also experienced new taste sensations – millet, polenta, sago pudding sweetened with lemon Tang, custard with

orange Tang and other culinary delights. The production of 300 additional and unplanned meals to ensure no-one went hungry was a Herculean effort by Hilary and helpers.

The Crew

The team included Bob and Penny Tyson, Hilary Bennell, Julie Donehue and daughter Marla, Dave and Christine Harris, David Reynolds, Ian and Joan Fitzallen, with full time assistance and wonderful hospitality from caretakers Polly Buchhorn, Mary Mummford and children Hazel and Finn. This proved to be a group of very enthusiastic workers which jelled quickly into an efficient team keen to complete as many of the tasks as possible. Overall the group put in more than 1800 hours of work. Not bad for a working bee planned to last ten days!

Signs

Four new marine reserve signs were installed at West Cove on Erith, Winter Cove, East Cove near the jetty, and East Cove above the LARC ramp. The old Australian Bush Heritage sign from Erith and old Conservation Area sign from Winter Cove were recovered and stored in the garage. A sign was made up for the lighthouse requesting visitors to remove their boots before climbing the tower.

Tree Clearing

A chainsaw was taken to Deal Island for Polly's use during the working bee, as she has the required training certification. Sheoaks blown over in the February gales around the houses, along the compound fence near the workshop, and along the Winter Cove and Barn Hill tracks were cleared. Branches were carted to the hillside above East Cove and laid across the slope to assist with revegetation. Limbs were cut into firewood lengths and stacked for use in the barbecues next summer.

The firebreak around the lighthouse and engine-shed was cleared to the boundary established after the 1993 bushfire. Cut sheoaks were dragged well down slope into the remaining trees. Sheoaks were cleared from the interior of the ruins, and to a distance of about one metre on the outside. Any trees growing in or on walls were carefully cut and removed.

Encroaching vegetation on the upper lighthouse road, and in culvert and drain outfalls, was also cleared.

Culverts and Drains

A total of 41 culverts, spoon-drains, and water-bars were identified, plotted by GPS and mapped on the lighthouse road. The 16 major ones were dug out, with approach drains and outfalls cleared of vegetation and dead branches. 110 metres of roadside drains were cleared of dead trees and tussocks. Ian, Joan, David Harris and Christine formed the nucleus of this enthusiastic team with help from others.

Fencing and Windbreaks

An area 40 metres by 4 metres on the southern side of the caretakers' house was fenced using posts and star pickets salvaged from disused fencelines, and second hand wire and netting. A 3.5 metre gate allowed for access. Sheoak seed was collected for propagation in Hobart. Seedling sheoaks on the old airstrip were identified for possible transplant into the new wind breaks.

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Weeds

The weed manual and weed recording sheets have been revised by Penny with input from Polly. Updated weed sheets for each patch of weeds, together with maps, were left on the island for use by future caretakers and working bees.

The Buchhorns had marked all remaining clumps and leaves of marram grass and these were wiped with glyphosate.

Six people spent three days spraying more than a third of the ragwort area, the Harris - Fitzallen team forming the nucleus of the weeding group. No sign of ragwort was seen on the track between the ford and Winter Cove. 152 litres of Brushoff mixture was used. The Tordon stick was used on outlying areas, and the edge mapped. Cold, windy, damp weather prevented further work on this weed.

All known patches of horehound at East Cove and Garden Cove were checked and weeded as necessary.

A major effort was made on sea spurge at Garden Cove and East Cove. At Garden Cove the main effort was west of the creek. 205 weed bags (25 kilo stock feed bags) were removed and burnt on the beach. The entire creek bank (60 metres) was cleared to reduce seed transfer to the eastern side; the eastern, southern and western boundaries were pushed back between ten and 40 metres. The 'before' and 'after' GPS boundaries indicate that about half the area was cleared. The remaining plants are mainly confined to the steeper, unstable sand dunes. The area east of the creek had been kept clear by Mary, Polly and family, and by previous caretakers. A few isolated plants were removed. An outlying patch of 30 or so plants was found and removed some distance uphill of the western side of the main patch. Other isolated outliers previously removed by Mary, Polly and family were tagged for future monitoring.

At East Cove the north-eastern boundary below the road was pushed back with the removal of 95 bags, and the south-eastern boundary along the top of the bank was also moved down the slope and marker stakes repositioned.

The total spurge score was 300 bags, roughly equivalent to 300 hours work.

Assistance was given to Mary and Hazel in removing small arum lillies as they emerge at the lighthouse ruins, the old airstrip, around the compound, and at

East Cove. Some around the compound and at East Cove were injected with glyphosate during the working bee.

Isolated mullien plants were removed in the Winter Cove erosion gully, and in the vicinity of the airstrip below the wallaby counting circle and below the western end.

Feral Pests

The rabbit population has shown quite an increase with several often seen in the compound on dusk, with squats and scratchings noted throughout the compound and as far away as the airstrip. The population was reduced by two by our blocking their escape routes under the compound fence, and herding them into a rugby style tackle from Polly.

Roofing, plumbing, and carpentry

David Reynold's roofing, plumbing, and carpentry skills were put to good use and with the help of others:

- replaced two of the skylights in the workshop including the safety mesh
- replaced guttering and downpipes on the workshop and reattached one on the museum
- replaced the flashing above the workshop door and reattached a panel on the museum chimney
- replaced the skylight over the porch on the caretakers' house
- repaired the front gate and fitted new hinges at the visitors' house
- built a new rustic driftwood side gate for the visitors' house
- built a new traditional-style clothesline for the visitors' house
- fitted a temporary seal to the top door of the lighthouse and measured up for a more suitable replacement
- measured up generator shed windows for future replacement
- built a new metal cover for the jetty winch
- re-roofed the dairy with Ian's assistance
- measured up water tanks and connecting pipes for future work
- adjusted the plate/lock on the wireless room door

Lighthouse Painting

Mary and Julie completed the painting of the stairs except for the last flight due to lack of paint.

Flag Hill Cairn

The cairn on the top of Flag Hill had been crushed by a fallen tree. David Reynolds and Ian Fitzallen removed the tree and rebuilt the cairn.

Heritage Discoveries

Four items of cultural heritage interest were located and photographed:

- a section of the old tramway was located with all four rails still in place and some brick paving, sleepers, and other items noted;
- a contraption made of timber and railway iron was found at the western end of the original airstrip. It is thought to be a smudger, which would have been towed behind a tractor or horse and used for grading the surface of the strip. Vegetation was cleared from around it and photos and measurements taken;
- the concrete Halfway House path referred to in the AMSA Conservation Plan was located, marked and photographed; and
- an iron collar from the old flagstaff west of the lighthouse was labelled and placed in the museum for safekeeping.

Miscellaneous Jobs

An obsolete aerial on the side of the radio room had been bent by the wind so was removed and stored in the garage with similar items. The clothes line at the visitors' house had been demolished by the February gale so it was dismantled and removed.

Recommendations for Future Working Bees

The extended stay of this trip was due to continuous adverse weather. For future working bees it is recommended that:

- there needs to be better information provided to potential participants about isolation, weather conditions and the potential for sea transport delays;
- a plan is needed for provision of emergency food supplies for similar future situations; and
- the timing of working bees should be reviewed to match more stable weather conditions.



Friends of Clayton's Corner – Mark O'May

In April 2005, for the fourth successive year, Friends of Clayton's Corner sailed the *Martrudan* from Hobart to Port Davey for two weeks of annual maintenance on retired fisherman Clyde Clayton's old cottage at Clayton's Corner, Bathurst Harbour. The cottage is open to daytime visitors and accessed from the jetty at Clayton's Corner. Tourists are conducted to the cottage by boat from Melaleuca.

Fishing vessel *Martrudan* was again made available through the kindness of Mark O'May and the work was undertaken thanks to the leadership and assistance of PWS ranger, Albert Thompson.

On previous visits the group's work included roofing the cottage, stabilising foundations, and transporting and installing a 5,000-gallon water tank. This year's work mainly focused on renewal of the internal plywood lining of the cottage ceiling and walls. Other work included extensive gardening, gutter cleaning and realignment, bargeboard flashing protection, external wash-down, windowsill repairs, painting and staining. The trip was partly funded through a grant from WILDCARE Inc.

The group's restoration work is aimed at developing the fisherman's cottage into a historic heritage information centre for day visitors. Further information can be obtained from group secretary, Geoff Doolan, on phone 03 6239 1150.



Friends of Maatsuyker Island (FOMI) – Fiona Taylor

FOMI have been busy since our last group report. PWS funded a follow-up weeding program in February, co-ordinated by Southern District Volunteer Co-ordinator Craig Saunders, which continued the work of last November (see *WILDTIMES* Issue 24). Another Envirofund-supported program will occur in November 2005 (further details in Volunteer Opportunities article in this issue).

FOMI continue to be actively involved in island affairs. We submitted an expression of interest to the Tasmanian Community Fund's cultural heritage round, to conserve and restore the former lighthouse-keepers' quarters. These quarters are now used for caretakers, volunteer programs, and other community activities encouraged to make use of the facilities. Although unsuccessful, we will try again in TCF's next general grant round. We have also provided input to PWS's reserve activity assessment for a proposed wind generator on the island. FOMI supports the installation of renewable energy systems on Maatsuyker Island, but are keen to ensure that these initiatives do not have an adverse impact on our beloved island's natural and cultural heritage values.

The Maatsuyker caretakers' changeover in May provided a good excuse for 'old' to meet 'new'. Caretakers Phillipa and Mick (summer) and Rosanna and Nick (autumn) were welcomed from the island with a dinner at Citrus Moon in Kingston. Fiona and Rob returned for a brief stint before current (winter) caretakers Louise and Paul arrived to take over.

The formation of Friends of Tasman Island (FoTI) – Carol Jackson

Many of us have been keen to see the formation of a Friends of Tasman Island for some time. Christian Bell facilitated a meeting on 2 May, which saw the formation of a new WILDCARE group similar to other lighthouse islands (Deal and Maatsuyker). Our aim is to care for the cultural and natural heritage of the island. Carol Jackson is president and Christian Bell is vice president.

FoTI was launched on 30 May at the Lark Distillery. Present were Kathy Gatenby, Carol Jackson, Dee Webb, John Buckpitt, Dallas and Shirley Baker, Nikki (Horne) Verver, Laurene Kelly, Mike Emery, Don Clark (Rotary), Peter Wilson (Mayor of Tasman Council), Pip Buchanan, Margie Jenkin and Christian Bell.

ABC Radio recorded an interview with Christian Bell and the Mercury did an interview with Carol Jackson. Carol provided a photographic display and Kathy Gatenby a photo album of their families' time on Tasman Island. Carol also brought the radio log book from Tasman Island (1945 - 55). A copy of Margie Jenkins' recent thesis on Tasmanian keepers and their families was also perused. Important networking took place and a more formal meeting of the new friends group will take place within a month. In the meantime we will maintain a register of those with an interest in the island. Email us at marine@keypoint.com.au.



Background Information

Tasman Island was de-manned and automated in 1977. There has been no permanent human presence on the island since. The island has a large collection of heritage buildings and structures associated with the light.

Most of the light's buildings were abandoned and little thought was given to the fate of the structures after the keepers were removed. The island was transferred to the Tasmanian Government in 1998.

Given there has been a gap of over twenty years since manned presence was removed from Tasman Island, there is considerably more work to do than groups on other Tasmanian lighthouse islands such as Deal and Maatsuyker.

Lighthouse fanciers, the relatives of previous keepers, sea kayakers, the Rotary Club of the Tasman Peninsula and those with an interest in the conservation of seabirds (Tasman is one of Tasmania's most significant seabird islands) have a desire to see Tasman Island protected. FoTI are keen to undertake joint activities with other groups and organisations that have an active interest in the island.

On 6 April 2006, the Lightstation will be 100 years old and the centenary would provide a great opportunity to promote the light and potentially secure resources for the maintenance of its cultural heritage.

Obtaining funding for a conservation management plan is one of the first activities that Friends of Tasman Island will address. Management issues on Tasman Island include the preservation of the cultural heritage of the island, the elimination of feral cats, and various weed and other land management issues.

Activities

We have contacted the Department of Environment and Heritage concerning the Commonwealth Heritage List status of Tasman Island. The listing obliges the Australian Government to do a conservation management plan for each listing.

However, our contact with DEH suggested that the process would amount to little more than a desktop study and probably not involve visiting the site. Further, the conservation management plan would only deal with the leased area of 15 hectares, which includes the tower but excludes all the other significant buildings.

We feel that the site is worthy of a more comprehensive conservation management plan. Tasman is the only substantial collection of lightstation buildings in Tasmania that are (mostly) intact for which neither AMSA nor the Commonwealth have funded a conservation management plan. Such a conservation management plan should cover the Lightstation site as a whole.

A letter has been written to the Chief Executive Officer of AMSA requesting that AMSA pay for such a plan. While not legally obliged to, it would be an extremely worthy gesture given the centenary of the Tasman light next year.

A similar letter has been sent to the General Manager of PWS advising that FoTI wish to be involved with on the ground working bees in a similar vein to the existing, very successful Deal and Maatsuyker Island friends groups.

We look forward to developing as good a working relationship with PWS. Christian has spoken to Steve Clark from AMSA who are contracted to service the Tasmanian and Victorian lights - their next maintenance visit to Tasman will be in October/November this year. Planning our first working bee to coincide with this maintenance visit will greatly reduce our transport costs.

Friends of Mount Field – Peter Franklin

The group worked on repairing Lake Nicholls Hut, arrived at an agreed schedule of works for the hut with our Ranger contact, and checked out another hut for potential work. We have also run three working bees on tracks in higher parts of the park.

Track Maintenance Field East Circuit - Sun 13 Feb 2005

We cleared some vegetation from the circuit track, concentrating on the slightly overgrown area on the saddle south west and prior to Windy Moor. We took a new log book with historical and Friends group information to Lake Nicholls Hut, and removed rubbish from the hut and Lake Fenton car park.

Fenton Webster Track Working Bee - Sat 16 Apr 2005

A successful working bee in ideal conditions cleared approximately 230 metres of bauera from the track. This section is the last one of medium density encroachment, leaving approximately 180 metres of lighter work to complete this task.

Greg Kidd started earlier and finished later than the rest of us and put in a magnificent effort.

Hut Assessments - Sat 7 May 2005

Inspected Lake Nicholls and Lake Fenton huts with Justin Lazenby from PWS to assess the maintenance work required, make measurements, and establish work priorities and future activities. New windowsills were installed at Lake Nicholls hut.



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Fenton-Webster Trackwork - Thu 2 Jun 2005

Commenced work at bottom near large creek (outflow from Dobson) and worked up the track for 230 metres, clearing sections of light to moderate bauera. Several other bushes, such as banksia and hakea, also required trimming. A most successful working bee, as the remaining section is little over 100 metres, plus some between the creek and Dobson track.

Wellington Park – Mike Bowden

Four successful working bees have been held over the last four months. The group was successful in gaining a \$41,000 Envirofund grant to rehabilitate and protect a highly significant population of threatened *Epacris acuminata* over an area of approximately 5.5ha within the Commonwealth National Estate registered Wellington Park Reserve. We will also target two strategic areas of native vegetation of 0.8ha and 1.5ha for rehabilitation, by removing highly invasive and competitive exotic species, and conducting revegetation works.

Middle Island Fire Trail - Tue 1 Mar 2005

Gorse eradication continued beside the fire break on the lower side of the Middle Island Fire Trail. The area cleared was approximately 150 sq metres, some of which was concentrated gorse.

Mountain River Broom - Tue 5 Apr 2005

The majority of the medium and large broom bushes have now been cut and piled. The area looks considerably different, as broom removal revealed small native plants. Substantial

broom seedlings remain and need to be dealt with, along with remaining mature bushes.

Weed working bee Lenah Valley site – Tue 3 May 2005

A 200 sq metre area of concentrated gorse, erica and a radiata pine was successfully cleared on the lower side of Middle Island Fire Trail. Ten volunteers attended (not all WILDCARE members).

Erica eradication Goat Hills - Tue 7 Jun 2005

A substantial patch of erica was cleared, with some pulled and others needing cut and paste. Also cleared was regrowth and plants missed during earlier working bees. Still to be done are two small patches of erica, an area of large bushes further along the trail, and a check for missed plants.

Tamar Island Wetlands – Julie Nermut

Volunteers have been busy at the Tamar Island Wetlands Centre with many school and community groups, as well as visitors from overseas, interstate and Tasmania, especially during the school holidays.

A highlight was on 12 May during Volunteers' week, with a celebration at the Centre attended by PWS staff, WILDCARE, community members and, of course, a large contingent of volunteers. Peter Mooney presented us with a framed certificate of appreciation recognising the work we do at the Centre and Wetlands.

On the same day the volunteers met Chris Colley, the new manager of the Northern District, PWS. We gave a powerpoint presentation of our work at the Centre and Wetlands, after which we discussed the future of the Volunteer Facilitator position, with the contract due to run out at the end of July.

Soon afterwards we learned that the position will be extended for six months and PWS will review the needs of volunteer groups during this time.

The Centre was also an excellent venue for the launch of the Tasmanian Wildlife Tourism Strategy on 27 May, with many volunteers attending the function, and the forum at Rosevears Estate with guest speaker, author Bradley Grieve.

Derwent Avenue Group (DAG) – Lorraine Nielsen

A great boost to our regeneration work has been the energy of two and a half days of labour by a Green Corps team of a supervisor and nine young volunteers.

A six-month project is currently based at Coningham but, as our needs are similar to theirs, hours spent on our site were used to initiate the volunteers in removing English grasses, planting poas and lomandras, and learning how to create a track.

Photos are used as a teaching tool and were taken at four particular points to allow monitoring for changes over time. The Green Corps team will return to us soon to present a report and examine the growth of their plants.

Another very positive experience was the Margate Festival at which DAGs' work was presented based mainly on four elements. A poster, created by one of our members, used cartoons, text and photos to express the activities on the Dave Burrows Walk, 'goodies' and 'baddies' of plants,



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replanting, and the excellent social interaction of the group. A raffle was held with a painting donated by Pam Adams, a member of our group, the prize. As a result of the festival, more visitors are walking on our pathway, and two new volunteers are interested.

We have made a formal submission to the Crown Land Assessment and Classification Project (CLAC) regarding their preliminary assessment of land in the Kingborough Municipality. We focused our attention on identified pockets between the Electrona (North West Bay) Marina and Dru Point, and east of the Channel Highway.

We have supported the review conclusions but have drawn attention to some anomalies and broader policy issues, which involve both Crown and council interests (for example, stream banks).

We are working slowly through a series of issues in order to extend the Walk from Derwent Avenue to Gemalla Road:

- We have conditional approval from PWS to manage the Crown Coastline Reserve and have sought approval from Kingborough Council to manage the public open space attached to it. The council had decided that the public open space was too steep and small to be of interest to them and therefore preferred to deem the land Crown land under PWS's land management. Appropriate documentation was lodged to the Land Titles Office at the end of May and the process is expected to be completed by the end of June/early July.
- Kingborough Council has given permission for public access across a road reserve, which is a strip of land running from the creek to a right angle bend in Gemalla Road.
- Kingborough Council has advised that quarterly samples of the creek have revealed that the water is polluted. The council believes that contamination has come from septic tank effluent from the houses on the northern side of Gemalla Road. Therefore it has approved connection to the planned reticulated sewer system for all dwellings and businesses in that area. When the new system is in place, the council believes seepage will cease.
- Problems of inadequate drainage from a company adjoining the reserve are being resolved. The company is co-operating with the council and a design for a new drainage system has been completed. The new system will be in place in the near future. Extensive damage to soils and plant life on the present (Crown) coastal strip has occurred from the saltwater. We have sought advice from PWS for handling remediation.

Following our request to PWS for advice on coastal erosion and eroded cliffs, Ranger Paul Dimmick spent a morning with us. He began with an awareness session on the process of erosion and deposit. Paul pointed out that the coast is a changing landscape and that human activities can exacerbate or reduce this. We need to consider how to work with these processes to achieve the best results.

We then walked around the reserve determining possible causes of erosion for each site and suggesting possible remedies. The role of our group is to choose the solution for each site and organise it. This session heightened our awareness regarding:

- the need for plants with strong roots on eroded cliff-tops;
- understanding which human structures may affect erosion/deposit;
- ways we can mimic nature by placing tree trunks, rocks and branches and other 'soft structures' on the foreshore in such a way to help protect the eroding coastline; and
- requesting the council to look at options for stormwater drainage on Derwent Avenue, to end in the Reserve rather than the sea.

Following the request to council on this last issue, the Bush Manager of Kingborough Council recommended a deep, wide ditch encompassing a weir in the copse of small trees in the reserve, near Derwent Avenue.

The weir will hold the stormwater for a time, allowing the water to flow over the weir towards the cliff in a more natural way. The council will be constructing the weir using Conservation Volunteers under the supervision of the Bush Manager.

Landcare has granted us \$500 to buy a First Aid Kit, small equipment, plants and office expenses such as printer ink cartridges. This is greatly valued assistance.

A sizeable article on the work of 'Dogged Dags' in the Bush section of *The Sunday Tasmanian* on 19 June 2005 was a very good way to illustrate the relationship between DAGs, PWS, the Kingborough Council, Landcare and WILDCARE. As John Cannon writes "It is a great example of community spirit and what can be achieved by working together."

Gambusia Project – Rodney Miller

The Gambusia Project is going extremely well, including talking to a lot of people, getting good media coverage and receiving requests for information. Organisations such as the Tasmanian Association of Recreational Fishing are requesting brochures to send to their members.

I attended the Tasmanian Landcare Association Conference with a Gambusia display, a good opportunity to spread the word to people from across the state. I also delivered a Gambusia presentation to members of the Longford Fishing Association and participated in a training session for Fishcare Volunteer Educators.

We have had a Gambusia article in the April/May edition of *Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News* and have lodged an expression of interest for a Gambusia display at the Tasmanian Trout Fishing Expo at Cressy in August.

Major events to date have been Agfest and the Inland Fisheries Open Day at Liawenee. DPIWE hosted the Gambusia Project alongside the WILDCARE Inc whale rescue display and Fishcare.

This worked very well as we had assistance from Wildcare and Fishcare, as well as from our PhD student Kerri. Over the three days we spoke to over 300 people, a very successful event.

The Inland Fisheries Open Day was also a great success, with support from Kerri and IFS. We spoke to a lot of people and are now finding that many have heard about Gambusia in the media, at shows, or from my talks.

The big news from the Gambusia Project is that we have just undertaken our first serious attempt at eradication of Gambusia from two important breeding sites in the Tamar Estuary.

In partnership with IFS and the University of Tasmania we have targeted two dams, one a property adjoining Tamar Island Wetlands, and the other an original release site in Legana.

Both dams have been pumped out and treated with lime, which kills any remaining fish. We spent considerable time rescuing and relocating any native fish found.

We will spend the next twelve months monitoring the sites to ensure success.

The other major issue we are currently dealing with is funding. We have submitted an expression of interest with NRM North for funds to continue the project for at least one more year, and hopefully two.

Friends of Kate Reed Reserve – Rodney Miller

Friends of Kate Reed Reserve have been very quiet of late, with nothing happening on-ground.

We are planning working bees later in the year and hope to get community members and Conservation Volunteers Australia involved.

We are also working with PWS to get some follow-up weed spraying done.

Friends of Trevallyn Reserve – Roy Skabo

Friends of Trevallyn Reserve have continued their weed eradication program with working bees each month.

We have cleaned up several patches of gorse and are working on a patch of Spanish heath, which we hope to finish off next Saturday.

We received a donation of a pair of loppers and a couple of pairs of gloves from Bunnings hardware store this week.

We are looking forward to the release of the draft management plan for the Trevallyn Reserve, expected this month. 🧑🏻‍🌾

A Walk in the Park CD-DVD

Tasmania's stunning national parks have been featured in a new audiovisual package produced by local production company *Sound Connexions Multimedia Pty Ltd*.

What began as a series of radio interviews about Tasmania's national parks has been turned into a visually appealing CD-DVD package that showcases the parks, PWS staff and others with a passion for these special places.

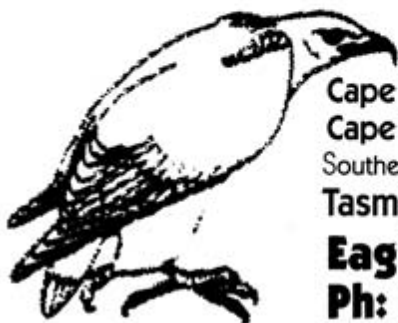
The Minister for Parks and Heritage, Judy Jackson, said "A Walk in the Park – Tasmania is an appealing audiovisual experience that enables people to visit, through words and images, some of the State's more remote regions and discover the stories of those with a special connection to these places".

The CD-DVD was recorded at a number of national parks, including Narawntapu, Mt William, Freycinet, Maria Island, Bruny Island, Tasman, Hartz Mountains, Mt Field, South West and Lake St Clair, and explores the history of the reserves, reasons for their reservation, special natural features and the staff who now care for these areas.

Great for those who have a special affection for these wonderful areas, who want to share this with others and to add to the experience of a subsequent visit with some very useful and interesting information.

The CD-DVD has been produced by ABC Audio and is available at ABC Shops. 🧑🏻‍🌾

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Thank you Jennifer Partridge

Elsewhere in this edition you will find an introduction to our new editor. Welcome aboard Kylie!

Our previous editor Jennifer Partridge found it necessary to withdraw from the position with the challenges of work, new study and new marriage to concentrate on.


Thank you very much Jennifer for your efforts and contributions to *WILDTIMES*. We wish you every bit of good luck for your newest ventures.

Jennifer was also responsible for arranging a \$1000 donation from KPMG to support Whale Rescue Training as part of a study scholarship she won. Thank you for that also Jennifer.

As anyone who browses our web site bulletin board Calendar of Events will know, the Whale Rescue Training has been going apace with more scheduled later in the year. This is really going to pay dividends when the next large stranding occurs.


I hope we see you around the traps Jennifer. 🐾

By: Andrew Smith
Co-Chair



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Volunteers caring for devils

Tasmanians are increasingly aware of the sad plight facing our icon – the Tasmanian Devil.

Last year 14 orphaned devil joeys were raised to independence by experienced volunteer carers. Most of these joeys came from mums that had been killed on our roads.

These same volunteer carers are gearing up for this year's orphaned devil intake.

All our devil carers attended an intensive training course in July that aimed to improve the group's knowledge of devil rearing as well as examine some of the issues surrounding the special protocols they must follow.

Without volunteer carers, vital information about this disease could be missed.

Now is a timely reminder for anyone coming across road-killed devils in the wild to be aware that many could have pouch young.

Remember it is vital that you do not touch any devils with your bare skin. Anyone touching a devil should be wearing two pairs of disposable gloves for their own safety and make sure they wash their hands immediately afterwards using a disinfectant such as Microshield.

If you do find a road-killed devil, remember personal hygiene and road safety, before you attempt to investigate the pouch. Or you could ring a local wildlife ranger for assistance. Devils are fully protected.

If you find orphaned devils you must ring the Nature Conservation Branch on 6233 6556. Orphaned devils must only go to carers who have been trained in the special requirements to handle devils.

Over the summer season, summer rangers on the Spirit of Tasmania ran interpretation programs aimed at informing travellers about Devil Facial Tumour Disease.



Stickers developed by Ray Green, Something Wild Wildlife Park, were a great way to inspire interest in the cause – many travellers not only bought stickers but also donated money to help devil researchers in the field. Over 1000 stickers were sold and another \$1400 given in donations.

This money was used to buy a special shed to house equipment for devils kept in off-display pre-export quarantine on Maria Island. The Parks and Wildlife Rangers on Maria Island care for these devils as part of their daily routine.

Devils need help from everyone. Please keep a careful watch for Tasmanian devils along our roads. Where safe to do so toss any roadkill off the road so devils are not encouraged onto the road to feed.

Always ensure the greatest priority is given to your own safety and only approach carcasses on the road if safe to do so.

Drive slowly at night and make sure dogs are contained at night, as wandering dogs can easily kill juvenile devils as well as sick adults. 🐾

By Ingrid Albion
Education Officer
Nature Conservation Branch.

Thankyou!

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Recommended Retail Price: \$22.00. Order through the **WILDCARE** Office, GPO Box 44 Hobart 7001. Please make cheques payable to The Tasmanian Trail Association.

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