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15

Conservation, timber and perceived values at Mt Field, Tasmania

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Introduction

Mt Field is a small mountain plateau the highest point of which, Mt Field West (1434 metres), overlooks a production forest in the Florentine Valley that today isolates it from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. While biodiversity has become the driving force in contemporary nature conservation, it was the scenic values of a landform, Russell Falls, now a Tasmanian tourism icon, that first triggered conservation initiatives in this part of Tasmania. This involved the first reservation of land for conservation purposes in Tasmania, 13 years after the declaration of the world's first national park at Yellowstone, USA. Three decades later, a larger national park was established at Mt Field, again the first in Tasmania. But subsequent revocation of part of the park to allow logging meant that rather than preserving the area for future generations it was not to survive intact for even a single human generation. This paper traces the history of Mt Field National Park and considers how perceptions of the area have impinged on the conservation of its natural values, including its important regions with underground drainage, or 'karst' landforms, such as caves. It also explores some wider impacts of events at Mt Field upon conservation in Tasmania.

In his review of the changing nature of federal-state relations in Australian forestry, Carron (1993) suggested that the bitterness that the flooding of Lake Pedder for hydro-electric development stimulated in conservation-minded people 'was to be at the heart of the conservation war that was there and then declared'. But what role might the earlier Mt Field controversy have played?

Scenery, recreation and tourism were pre-eminent in early perceptions of Mt Field. This early focus on these instrumental values contrasts with today's promotion which stresses its role as host to a number of important ecosystems: 13 rare plant species, a nationally rare marsupial, four invertebrate species listed as rare, threatened or vulnerable at the State level, and wet sclerophyll forest, subalpine and alpine plant communities of high conservation value. Today Mt Field is also acknowledged for its cultural heritage significance, containing both Aboriginal sites and historical European sites and structures. Its runoff supplies nearly 20 per cent of Hobart's water and the needs of all settlements between the park and the city.

Geology and climate underpin all these values. A sheet of dolerite rock caps the plateau upon which glaciers that formed in colder Pleistocene times left ice-abraded slopes, lakes and moraines that have been colonised by vegetation and wildlife. Sedimentary rocks form cliffs around the plateau margins including those over which Russell Falls and several other notable cascades tumble. Perhaps the most remarkable waterfalls of Mt Field National Park are the least known: they vanish mysteriously into forbidding natural shafts in the earth. Limestone that occurs along the western and southeastern margins of the park is riven by some of the deepest cave systems in Australia, part of an intriguing complex of karst landforms—the hidden heritage of Mt Field.

Evolution of the National Park

Located at the extreme eastern end of what is now Mt Field National Park and first sighted by Europeans around 1856, Russell Falls soon attracted scientific parties guided by the Rayner and Clark families from nearby Ellendale. Subsequently, a local agriculturalist, Louis Shoobridge, commenced lobbying for protection. The initial reserve of 121 hectares was proclaimed as Falls Reserve in 1885 under the *Waste Lands Act* 1863, but this legislation provided no more protection than withdrawing land from potential sale or lease. The area grew in popularity, trout were released into its mountain lakes by the late nineteenth century, a railway reached the area by the early 1900s, and skiing and skating became popular by the 1920s.

Strong advocacy by W.C. Crooke played a significant role in establishing Mt Field National Park, although he was apparently reticent about asking for a large area lest the proposal be rejected entirely. In 1912 he founded a National Park Association, comprising representatives of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club, University of Tasmania, Hobart City Council, Fisheries Commission, New Norfolk Council, and the Australian Natives Association. Crooke's principal concern appears to have been to protect the natural character and recreational values of the area. His colleagues, Henry Dobson and E.T. Emmett, focused more on tourism potential, while other advocates stressed the area's scientific values, including the Government Botanist, Leonard Rodway, Tasmanian Museum curator, Clive Lord, and University of Tasmania zoology professor, T. Thomson Flynn, father of the film star Errol.

In 1913 Crooke spearheaded protests against timber felling in the Falls Reserve by the Public Works Department, an activity that highlighted the insecurity of the existing reserve. In response to National Parks Association lobbying the Minister for Lands, Hon. E. Mulcahy, agreed to the reservation of 5000 acres (2024 ha). Such a small area was considered entirely inadequate by the conservation advocates. A change in government facilitated further lobbying that led to an agreement in 1915 by the new Minister, Hon. J. Belton, to reserve 27 000 acres (10 931 ha) covering Russell and Lady Barron falls and most of the Mt Field ranges (Lord 1918, Luckman 1953, 2001). This reserve was proclaimed under the *Crown Lands Act* 1911 (9 March 1915) as National Park Reserve, being gazetted simultaneously with Freycinet Peninsula on Tasmania's east coast to constitute Tasmania's first national parks.

The *Scenery Preservation Act* 1915 established a new reserve system and a Scenery Preservation Board, structured such as to give dominance to representatives of developmental agencies, that was charged with making recommendations on land reservation. National Park Reserve was revoked and simultaneously re-proclaimed under this legislation, again as National Park Reserve (29 August 1916). On 26 January 1917 it was vested in a National Park Board, the structure of which still reflected the predominance of economic imperatives, particularly tourism and water supply.

Just 1500 metres south of Mt Field National Park lies June Cave, source of the June River (a tributary of the Tyenna River) and probably first seen by Europeans around 1890. The conservation significance of caves was well-recognised at the time, Australia's first national park-type reserve, of 5000 acres (2024 ha) having been established around Jenolan Caves (NSW) in 1866, and formal reserves proclaimed to protect caves in northern Tasmania

in the 1890s. A small area (20 ha) around the entrance to Junece Cave was for many decades indicated on county charts as 'reserved land' though from what date is uncertain (Kiernan 1974). In correspondence with the renowned NSW government cave explorer, Oliver Trickett, in 1917, the Tasmanian Government geologist, W.H. Twelvetrees, erroneously indicated that Junece Cave lay 'in National Park reserve' (Twelvetrees 1917), although the wording is slightly ambiguous. This raises the possibility that a disjunct part of the intended park may have slipped from the final proclamation. By this time the probability was recognised that the main headwaters of the underground Junece River lay 9-10 kilometres distant in the Florentine Valley below Mt Field West. In his correspondence with Trickett, Twelvetrees also referred to these 'Mt Field Caves on Mt Field West (Mt Humboldt) ... on the reserve recently created for a national park' (Twelvetrees 1917, Middleton 1991).

Further proclamations under the *Scenery Preservation Act* extended the park to 15 583 hectares (18 February 1919), then 16 690 hectares (10 June 1930), then 17 028 hectares (29 May 1940). An area below Mt Field West preserved a small sample of the *Eucalyptus regnans* forest of the Florentine Valley. It was from this valley that most of the thylacines exhibited in the old Hobart zoo were later captured, most recently in 1933, further sightings in this area being reported as recently as 1952 and 1980 (Sharland 1962, Smith 1981). But it was the old-growth forest rather than this charismatic carnivore that underpinned reservation here. National Park Reserve was renamed Mt Field National Park in 1947. Its reconstituted National Park Board still reflected the predominantly utilitarian aspirations of government.

In officially opening the National Park on 13 October 1917, Governor Newdegate noted one of its important attributes was that it contained some of the finest timber in Tasmania. Both his remarks and the afternoon's entertainment—woodchopping events—were to prove prophetic. Government aspirations for economic development west of Mt Field saw track construction and futile attempts at pastoral settlement from the 1850s until after World War II (Kostoglou 1996). With Parliament's approval, the Government granted a forest concession over 124 000 hectares in the Florentine Valley in 1932 that enabled Australian Newsprint Mills Pty Ltd to open the country's first newsprint mill near Hobart in 1941. Subsequently, the company made several attempts to secure access to the national park forest beneath Mt Field West that had been specifically excluded from the original concession. After an attempt in 1946 to have the park boundary changed failed for legal reasons, the company proposed to compensate the park with alternative areas from the company's concession. Australian

Newsprint Mills, in correspondence to the Premier (2 January 1948), asserted that the area below Mt Field West contained 'faulty trees' that would 'warrant only a salvage operation', but that as:

an integral part of the high forest of the Florentine Valley [they] should be worked, regenerated and fire-protected as such. In view of...the important part this belt of forest...which is partly within and partly outside of the existing boundary of the National Park...will play in maintaining log supplies...the company is prepared to undertake this work (Kessell 1948).

Resulting public debate bore many hallmarks of later Australian conservation disputes. A submission by the Australian Natives Association to a subsequent Parliamentary inquiry usefully summarises conservationist objections: opposition to any park alienation to permit commercial encroachment; a claim the forest was the only one of its type in any Tasmanian national park; its potential value as a tourist attraction; dispute of the alleged quality of the forest in the proposed compensation area; and concern that revocation might prove the thin edge of a wedge that would allow logging in other parks (Peterson 1949). The company and Government attempted to stymie a favourable decision by claiming that if Australian Newsprint Mills did not gain access to the park timber it would have to close its mill. The development lobby consistently sought to belittle the conservation value of the revocation area and to inflate the conservation value of the proposed compensation area. There was considerable concern that backroom deals included promises to the company which the Government was desperate to honour. Immediately after the 1948 State elections, the debate took a new tack when development proponents and the Government suggested that doubt existed as to the true position of the park boundary. This was notwithstanding protestations by the Australian Natives Association that six maps printed by the Government since the park was proclaimed all clearly showed the disputed forests to be well inside the park. A Parliamentary committee inquiring into the revocation proposal became side-tracked by this boundary issue and defined an entirely new boundary, although providing no justification for it. However, when the Government subsequently took legislation to Parliament, the preamble to the *National Park and Florentine Valley Bill* 1949 acknowledged the reality that it provided for 'transfer of a certain area of Mt Field National Park' to the company.

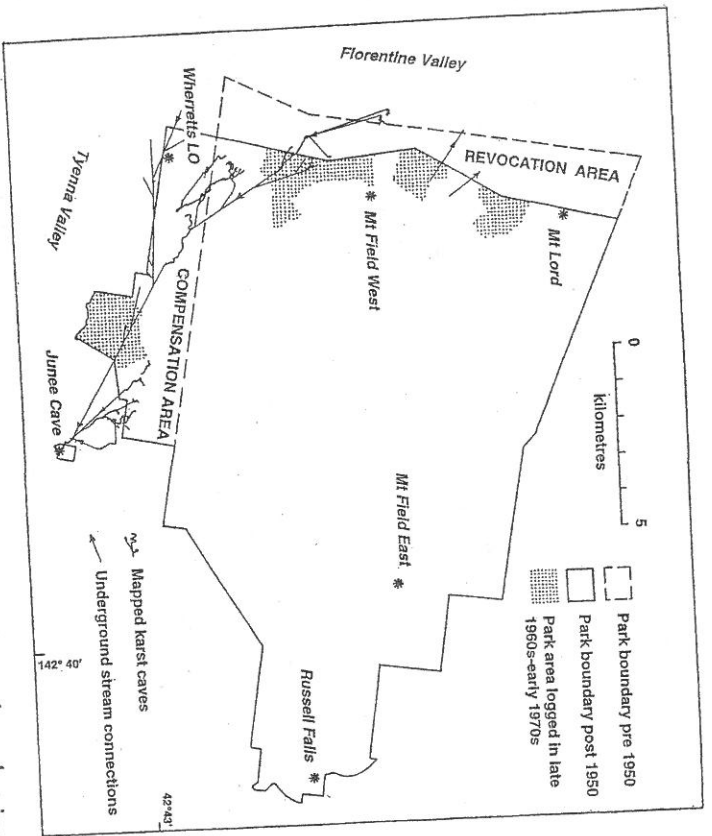


Figure 1: National Park boundary changes and sites of later salvage logging within Mt Field National Park, in relation to karst cave complexes.

The *National Park and Florentine Valley Act 1950* that eventually revoked from the park the 1490 hectares of the Florentine forest below Mt Field West (Figure 1). As compensation, 1640 hectares of mixed forest was added to the southern margin of Mt Field National Park and possible increases in the annual grant to the Scenery Preservation Board were suggested (Luckman 1953, Tappere 1985). Subsequent minor changes to the park included compulsory acquisition of 10 hectares under the *Land's Resumption Act 1910* (3 May 1950), substitution of an equivalent area under the *Scenery Preservation Act 1915* (on 26 June 1950) and the addition of 1 hectare at the park entrance (on 1 November 1970). With passage of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1970* the area became a State Reserve, still known as Mt Field National Park. Later additions included 45 hectares on the south side of Lady Barron Creek (on 18 May 1977) and 8 hectares near Russell Falls (26 September 1990). The total of the areas gazetted suggest that the current extent of Mt Field National Park is 17 242 hectares, but a computer recalculation in 1990 found its true area to be 15 881 hectares (Parks and

Wildlife Service 2000). The informal Junee Cave reserve was also redesignated as a State Reserve (on 8 September 1976), albeit still protecting only the outflow point of this extensive underground river rather than the extraordinary cave system through which it flows.

Consequences of revocation for protecting natural values

The most obvious consequence of park revocation for natural values was progressive loss of the Mt Field West forests. Logging required construction of an extensive road network and considerable disturbance of soils, watercourses and biota previously included in the park. Such argument on natural values as had arisen over the boundary controversy had focussed upon the forests and other park values that would feel the brunt of development were given little account. But it is interesting to note that press reports of Parliamentary debates, and representations by the Government, the Forestry Commission and the company all stressed the potential for new caves to be discovered in the area it was proposed to add to the park in compensation for the area to be revoked below Mt Field West. Yet they conspicuously failed to acknowledge the presence of caves in the area to be revoked which Twelvetrees correspondence to Trickett indicates had been known about in Government circles for at least two decades (Twelvetrees 1917).

In 1946 the Tasmanian Gavernment Club had visited Junee Cave on its first official outing, penetrating only a short distance before being thwarted by a water-filled passage that continues to challenge cave divers today. But over subsequent decades many tributary caves have been explored, involving the establishment of successive Australian cave depth records as explorers penetrated further into this extraordinary underground system. The Junee-Florentine caves, which evolved partly in response to torrential discharge of glacier meltwaters, offer insights into natural climate change and have since also revealed relics left by ice-age humans, bones of extinct ice-age megafauna, and invertebrate fauna adapted to the perpetual darkness and found nowhere else on Earth (Goede and Harmon 1983, Cosgrove 1989, Eberhard 1998, Kiernan et al. 2001). The dissolving of limestone by waters that descend from the plateau and are acidified within the forest soils by biologically-produced carbon dioxide is a critical natural process in these caves which are sensitive environments that are highly susceptible to land management practices. Retention of the forest and soil cover, and catchment

stability, together with proper management of recreational impacts, are key requirements for protection of this remarkable underground heritage.

Logging that followed the revocation of the Mt Field West forests occurred at a time when the presence of caves in the general area was well known but documentation remained very deficient and there was little understanding of their value or sensitivity. Road construction, timber felling and extraction practices saw serious soil erosion including scalping of vulnerable karst soils that control the chemistry and release of critical natural seepage to caves. Debris was dumped into sinkholes that fed water underground, causing sedimentation of underground streams. In 1976 consultants reporting upon another matter made incidental mention of logging having caused deposition of over 1 metre of sediment in one cave below Mt Field West, blocking access into it (Richards and Ollier 1976).

New caves were found in the area revoked, both within the Junee catchment and further north. The Welcome Stranger Cave (discovered 1969) is a highly decorated stream cave over a kilometre long. The new park boundary left one-half of this cave in Mt Field National Park and the other half in production forest, which was then clear-felled. Dehydration and consequent physical degradation of the previously sparkling flowstones in the cave followed logging, probably due to increased water uptake by the dense regrowth scrub. Several significant caves have since been discovered in the area added to the southern side of the park to compensate for the revocation, but because disturbance at the upstream extremity of a river cave system enables environmental damage to be transmitted downstream through the entire system, disturbance of the area under Mt Field West was the worst possible scenario for the Junee River system. Moreover, even the caves in the compensation area were now to feel direct onslaught.

Wildfires occurred in the Russell Falls area in the 1890s and in 1934. In 1949 Premier Cosgrove asserted that the proposed revocation area had never been accessible to visitors and that 'the only access would be through the road the company was to construct and, because of fire risk, picnic parties could not use it' (*The Mercury*, 3 February 1949). He expressed a markedly different view of the compensation area: 'It is an area which can be protected from fire by the combined efforts of rangers and the company's fire patrols' (*The Mercury*, 22 March 1949). But notwithstanding such convenient assurances, a fire caused major damage in 1960. Its origin is contentious, but may have been in the logging concession. It burnt out a substantial area in and adjacent to the Humboldt Valley and much of the compensation area which, during his 1948 lobbying, the Forestry Commissioner had told the Premier should and could be protected for all time. Then

in 1966 further intense fires that originated as management burns in the Australian Newsprint Mills concession caused major damage to other parts of the park, including destroying the slow-growing, fire-sensitive, high-altitude vegetation on Tarn Shelf in the central part of Mt Field National Park, so valued by early park advocates such as Rodway—damage that may take a millenium or more to heal. Large areas of forest overlying karst were also burned.

Forest vegetation at lower altitudes had formerly maintained the stability of steep slopes through the binding action of tree roots and the reduction in soil pore water pressures by transpiration. After the fires, landslides began to occur on some steeper slopes around the Mt Field Plateau as the roots of fire-killed trees rotted out, and still longer-term changes in slope stability were triggered. Massive volumes of sediment flooded into some cave streamsinks to the detriment of water quality, underground aquatic ecosystems and cave scenery. The great clarity of the stream in Welcome Stranger Cave had initially been celebrated, but a major landslide now occurred inside the park where forest had been killed by the fire lit by Australian Newsprint Mills that escaped from its logging concession. The landslide reached the streamsink that feeds Welcome Stranger so that the cave stream still often runs turbidly nearly two decades later, and considerable silt has been deposited through the cave (Kiernan et al. 1993). Another major landslide over a kilometre long plummeted from a burnt-out area in the compensation area on Wherretts Lookout. At least one karst streamsink was buried entirely and the river emerging from Junee Cave more than seven kilometres distant ran heavily turbid.

Logging inside the remaining National Park

So much for the revocation and its aftermath, but a less well-known phase of logging deep inside some areas that remained national park was to follow, unleashing a new wave of impacts. In 1966 a Forestry Commission report suggested that salvaging the trees in Mt Field National Park killed by escaped Australian Newsprint Mills fires would probably not benefit regeneration and would increase the fire hazard considerably for at least 10 years afterwards, although the magnitude of that hazard could be reduced by burning after logging (Gilbert 1966). But on Black Tuesday, 7 February 1967, bushfires elsewhere in southern Tasmania killed 62 people and destroyed over 1300 homes, profoundly sensitising the population with regard to issues of fire hazard. Less than a fortnight after the Black Tuesday fires, Forestry

Commissioner Crane wrote to the Scenery Preservation Board to convey an Australian Newsprint Mills suggestion:

that it could be of advantage to the Scenery Preservation Board if salvage operations were extended to include the burnt timber in the park... it was agreed that the following proposals should be submitted to your Board (Crane 1967).

The Mt Field National Park Board concurred and correspondence to at least one company confirms that one of its aims was 'to reduce future fire hazards in the park' (Scenery Preservation Board 1967). Three other companies that expressed interest during March 1967 were informed that Australian Newsprint Mills had already been given the task. The Mt Field National Park Board indicated to the Scenery Preservation Board (on 7 April 1967) that the work should be completed within three years. The first permit for salvage logging was issued by the Scenery Preservation Board on 14 August 1967. The company was required to fall all trees not suitable for converting into timber or pulpwood, and to prepare the ground for natural regeneration of eucalypt, and, where necessary, promote regeneration by seed sowing (Figure 1).

The Mt Field National Park Board, starved of funds to manage the park, also saw the opportunity to direct royalties from salvage logging towards upgrading its fire-fighting capacity. A memorandum dated 13 February 1975 by B.S. Simmonds, Executive Officer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (which replaced the Scenery Preservation Board following new legislation enacted in 1970), confirms 'one object was to use royalties for park work' (Simmonds 1975). But actually getting the money proved more difficult. The Scenery Preservation Board Chairman wrote hopefully to his Minister on 21 August 1967: 'Recently, on the recommendation of the Board, you have accepted the Company's offer to help repair the damage to the Park caused by the fires lit by the Company in March 1966...' (Miles 1967). But when the anticipated royalties could not be obtained under Scenery Preservation Board provisions, a special grant was requested. Minister for Lands and Works, Cashion, wrote on 4 September 1967 to the Premier and State Treasurer, Reece, who replied two days later:

In determining the amount of the annual contribution to be made to the Board, regard was had to its needs in relation to the overall financial position of the State. I see no reason, therefore, why the amount of \$30 000 to be received in royalties from the sale of timber should be made available to the Board in addition to the amounts which it will receive by appropriation from its own revenues (Reece 1967).

Simmonds (1975) confirms the objective of securing funds for park work 'was nullified as the revenue was required to be paid to Consolidated Revenue (S17(5), *Scenery Preservation Act 1915*). Thus the Board was effectively duded, and the promised fruits of accession to an intrusion that caused gross and lasting disturbance were never returned. It might have been a very dangerous precedent nevertheless, tempting other sales of reserved lands by park boards similarly starved of funds by disinterested governments, in a bid to raise sufficient money to manage the residual areas.

A covering letter from Scenery Preservation Board Chairman Miles forwarded with the logging permit had specified the salvage logging be completed in three years, and this time frame was repeated in the ministerial approval given in July 1967 (Simmonds 1975). When the first permit expired on 31 July 1968, Forestry Commissioner Crane gave the company a further authorisation. On 28 April 1977 Parks Minister Bart indicated to a constituent, who expressed concern at the extent of disturbance inside the park, that logging was conducted from 1969-1972 and aerial and hand seeding in selected areas undertaken from 1971-1973 (Bart 1977). However, National Parks and Wildlife Service files indicate logging continued until 1974. Simmonds (1975) recommended that 'no further logging, clear felling or other timber salvage work be permitted within the Park and Australian Newsprint Mills and Forestry Commission be formally advised of this decision'.

Impacts on values

As a consequence of the salvage logging, the impacts of road construction and logging, management fires and slope destabilisation were extended to additional areas. Major visual impacts resulted and the karst and its catchment further disturbed, including some of the most sensitive parts of the karst where headwater streams draining the mountains first encountered the limestone and, hence, where cave development was most pronounced.

Predictably, many new caves were discovered as the forests were levelled. Tassy Pot, located inside the park boundary, became for some years the deepest cave known in Australia. Its exploration was made extremely hazardous by loose boulders and logging debris that had been bulldozed into the entrance and which plummeted unpredictably down the 50 metre entrance shaft whenever disturbed by the movement of the ropes and flexible ladders used by cavers to descend or ascend (Kierman 1999). Other reported impacts of road construction, logging and fires included physical

damage to caves by blasting, soil erosion, landslips, cave stream siltation, and failed regeneration of forest.

Simmonds (1975) recommended measures to encourage revegetation of disturbed areas and disperse road drainage:

Problems are encountered on the higher elevations and over limestone outcrops where eucalypts are either slow or impossible to re-establish, and in these areas it seems preferable to sow mixed native species as may occur in similar situations to 'cover the scars' of logging.

But Parks Minister Batt's 1977 letter to his constituent suggests there was no seeding or planting after 1973. Notwithstanding the obvious impacts of the roads, Batt advised: 'at this stage there has been no action on the logging roads' using as an excuse 'they could be useful fire trails and access in the event of future outbreaks'. A later recommendation by a park ranger that the company be requested to close the roads at the park boundary (Eden 1977) also appears to have borne no fruit. These areas remain sources of sediment input to the karst even today. The potentially ongoing implications of changes to karst water circulation caused by logging were highlighted in the early 1990s when sinkholes engulfed roads built towards the compensation area during salvage logging in the late 1960s.

Management through the 1980s and 1990s

The salvage logging of the 1960s and 1970s did not end incursions into the park, much of its boundary remaining unmarked on the ground. In 1992 forestry operations penetrated to within a stone's throw of Russell Falls. Meanwhile, a new threat arose. Caves are often delicate environments where natural repair of visitor impacts occurs over geological rather than human time scales, where every broken stalactite and inadvertent muddy footprint on a crystalline flowstone floor is effectively permanent. Opening of many logging roads to public access during the 1990s allowed inexperienced cavers and casual visitors easy access to hundreds of caves. This would be a management nightmare for any Parks Service starved of sufficient funds to respond effectively, but many of these caves lie in State forest administered not by a conservation agency but by a development-focused corporation that has no cave management expertise. Most of those who remember the pristine beauty of the virgin Welcome Stranger Cave now prefer their memories to re-visiting a cave that has been rendered a shadow of its former

splendour, due not to the fault of any particular agency or individuals but to deficiencies in the management system or, more accurately, the lack of one.

Greater recognition of the need for careful management of karst forests emerged following a 1984 study of the National Estate-listed Mole Creek area in northern Tasmania (Kiernan 1984). This had some positive spinoffs in the *Tasmanian Woodchip Exports Commonwealth/State Memorandum of Understanding* (1988), but that Memorandum also declared that 'On the basis of advice from the Heritage Commission, Forest Operations can be carried out without adversely affecting the National Estate significance of the... Florentine Valley Caves'. A subsequent proposal to investigate problems associated with management of karst systems that extend beneath arbitrary land tenure boundaries such as those around Mt Field founded after failing to receive essential Commonwealth funding. The Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association, the regional professional body of karst managers, recommended at its 1991 conference that the Junee-Florentine karst system simply be included in the park. Despite the advent of new forest practices legislation and special provisions for karst it was not until 1993 that funding became available to initiate an inventory of the Junee-Florentine karst (Eberhard 1998). Considerable further damage occurred in the interim (Kiernan et al. 1993) and the level of inventory achievable with the funding available, while very valuable, proved inadequate for detailed planning of forest operations.

Some informal planning and reservation decisions followed the karst inventory but karst was not included among the nationally-agreed criteria for the establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia (JANIS Reserve Criteria). Hence, no secure karst reserves were established in the 1996-1997 Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement process. Although patently incomplete in scope, the Regional Forest Agreement has been promoted by some parties as being the last word on Tasmanian conservation, an imprimatur writ in stone. Some conservationists argue that stone had better be as soluble as the limestone in which the Junee-Florentine caves have formed, because some measure of recompense for the damage inflicted upon this important karst remains long overdue, together with meaningful rehabilitation initiatives.

Discussion

When opening Mt Field National Park in 1917 Governor Newdegate predicted that:

the park will be a thing of beauty and a joy forever [and that] By this reservation a typical example of Tasmania's forest will be retained in its natural state, in order that generations yet unborn may see for themselves what virgin Tasmania was like (Parks and Wildlife Service 2000).

That his vision might not be fulfilled was vigorously resisted. Yet it is the campaign against drowning of Lake Pedder for hydro-electric development rather than the overlooked Mt Field revocation controversy that is often cited as the birth of Tasmanian or even Australian conservation activism (Pybus 1990). In his analysis of decision-making prior to the Pedder development, McKenry (1972) argued that ill-feeling was generated by the fact that the powerful agency responsible viewed the development as in the best interests of the state, presented its proposals in such a way as to give a misleading picture of environmental effects, and misrepresented the value of Lake Pedder in its natural state, albeit perhaps due to a lack of understanding of non-technical matters rather than to intentional deception. This implies that narrow agency values and goals were construed as the only legitimate ones. But in these respects there are striking parallels in the role played by the Forestry Commission during the bitter Mt Field revocation debate.

Although much of the motivation for conservationist opposition to the Mt Field revocation appears to have involved concern over a dangerous precedent being set, it was not events at Mt Field National Park that set that precedent: it had already been established seven years earlier when 1214 hectares of Hartz Mountains National Park in far southern Tasmania were revoked on 7 April 1943 to allow logging (Mercer and Peterson 1986). But the Hartz precedent was certainly compounded, and some of the principal actors in the Mt Field drama and some of the tactics they employed were then recycled into later conservation debates. Pressure for further park revocations included a 1952 recommendation by the Kingborough Council to the Forestry Commission that timber companies be allowed to cut trees in certain scenic reserves which were 'unlikely to be exploited as tourist attractions' (*The Mercury*, 11 March 1952). A further 405 hectares were revoked from Hartz Mountains National Park on 12 March 1952; another 283 hectares were revoked on 5 May 1958.

In a November 1976 variation of the tactic employed successfully at Mt Field, the Tasmanian Parliament, under Premier Reece, revoked yet another 2150 hectares of Hartz Mountains National Park, ostensibly to compensate the now defunct Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd for reserving a very remote corner of its logging concession at Precipitous Bluff (Kiernan 1975). Estimated wood volumes in the two areas and the much greater accessibility

of the Hartz forests were considered by conservation interests to be weighted heavily in favour of the company, offering a commercially much more attractive proposition (Harwood 1978). Most if not all the steep and rugged Precipitous Bluff karst could not be logged under today's *Forest Practices Code* for soil and water management reasons, and hence would not now attract compensation.

During the 1970s efforts were also being made to secure protection of the longest single cave then explored in Australia, the 20 kilometre-long Exit Cave near Lune River in southern Tasmania, but again strong objections were maintained by the Forestry Commission who were prepared to set aside only such land as might be required for essential purposes, such as car parking. Part of Exit Cave was eventually reserved in 1979, but adequate boundaries were not adopted until after the majority report of the Lemon-thyme and Southern Forests Commission of Inquiry (Fleisham et al. 1988) endorsed its World Heritage significance—one of only four small areas to qualify under the very rigid criteria adopted by the Inquiry. Even then there was a long battle before the progressive destruction of the cave by a limestone quarry was halted (Kiernan 1993).

Events at Mt Field influenced other types of Tasmanian conservation issues, including Lake Pedder. The Premier of the day was E.F. Reece who as Minister for Works had chaired the Parliamentary committee that endorsed the revocation of the Florentine forests from the Mt Field National Park; and who as State Treasurer had denied the National Park Board the royalties it anticipated from salvage logging. When possible implications of development in the Serpentine Valley area first stirred public concern, Premier Reece's acknowledgment merely that there would be 'some modification' of Lake Pedder National Park (McKenry 1972) faintly echoed the innocuous terminology employed in the *National Park and Florentine Valley Bill* 1949 which indicated its purpose was merely to 'amend' the boundaries of Mt Field National Park. When conservationists obtained legal opinion indicating that flooding of Lake Pedder National Park was unlawful and proposed to seek an injunction, Reece appointed himself Attorney General, and promptly recycled the title 'Doubts Removal' from the Mt Field Bill into new legislation to retrospectively legalise the flooding. Similar retrospective legislation was enacted in 1981 to validate flooding of Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park by the Pieman River Power Development.

In responding to claims for the protection of natural areas, some forestry advocates complain that industry is always the loser. The history of Mt Field National Park shows this assertion is unsustainable. Over 5500 hectares of

Tasmania's National Parks have been permanently revoked to allow logging in areas once supposedly preserved in perpetuity. Mercer and Peterson (1986) have contrasted the extent of park revocation in Tasmania against a history of minimal revocation elsewhere in Australia and concluded that no other Australian State has adopted a policy of park revocation quite so readily. While Tasmania may have a greater percentage of its total area under reservation than any other State, this smallest State has permanently revoked a greater area of national parklands, in absolute area terms, than has any other, and possibly a greater area than the total revoked in all other States combined. And almost entirely for logging. Revocation was replaced in the 1960s and 1970s by mechanisms to permit development inside parks, as evident from the 'salvage' logging inside Mt Field National Park and the drowning of Lake Pedder, the latter leaving Tasmania's apparent area of national parks misleadingly inflated by a 240 square kilometre artificial reservoir.

Hence, Lake Pedder was not the birthplace of Australia's conservation movement nor was it even the first 'national' campaign, as evident from interstate representations on the Mt Field issue, for instance by the Queensland National Parks Association. The significance of the often overlooked campaign waged by those who resisted the Mt Field revocation was much greater than has been generally acknowledged, even in texts purporting to record the evolution of the Australian conservation movement (Hutton and Connors 1999, Mulligan and Hill 2001). Indeed, few contributors even to a recent history of Tasmanian forest conservation campaigns (Gee 2001) seem to recognise any history before their own.

Important management problems persist at Mt Field itself. In their correspondence to the Premier dated 2 January 1948, Australian Newsprint Mills claimed that giving it access to the western part of the park meant 'that the outlook over the forests of the Florentine Valley from the outstanding mountain peaks in the National Park will be enhanced and not spoiled by the Company's operations', apparently basing this view on the assumption that replacing 'over-mature' forest containing 'faulty' trees by regenerated forest would improve the scenery. No mention was made of the scars to be left by roads, quarrying and logging. The outlook from Mt Field West, the most celebrated summit within Mt Field National Park and a grandstand towards the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, has since been massively disturbed by logging of the original Australian Newsprint Mills concession, the revoked national parklands, and by un-rehabilitated logging roads and poorly-regenerating forest and alpine vegetation within the park itself. Park boundary design remains wholly inadequate, with arbitrary cadastral

boundaries cutting across natural systems such as the caves. Meanwhile some sensitive caves are increasingly being loved to death due to the absence of any effective cave management.

Since the first conservation initiatives were taken at Mt Field, perspectives on the values of parks have evolved. The former focus on scenery, recreation and tourism has been overtaken by a greater emphasis on scientific approaches to the conservation of biodiversity. But environmental attributes other than biology remain under-recognised, undervalued and under-managed. The Junee-Florentine caves never featured significantly in the anti-revocation campaign by the conservation lobby and were given no account in the un-resisted decision to allow salvage logging in the remaining park. That same excessively biocentric focus which proved so detrimental to the conservation of wider environmental diversity at Mt Field remained evident in the neglect of geodiversity during the 1996-1997 Regional Forest Agreement process, which left some of Australia's deepest and most important limestone caves still lacking adequate legislative protection.

Conservation activists continue to focus on tall trees, mirroring the scientific community's preoccupation with biodiversity, and bureaucratic and political responses to that narrow agenda. Meanwhile wider environmental diversity, and particularly geodiversity, still languishes. As the karstic arteries pulsing beneath Mt Field continue to face occlusion by sediment bleeding from the wounds inflicted, we should perhaps be asking ourselves how many other hidden values are being overlooked and undervalued in contemporary land allocation and forest management.

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