

Tom Gibson Nature Reserve



Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania

DEPARTMENT of TOURISM, PARKS
HERITAGE and the ARTS

The Tom Gibson Nature Reserve—Epping Forest

In December 1991 the Parks and Wildlife Service purchased a 665 ha area of land at Epping Forest in the Tasmanian Midlands, with money provided by the Commonwealth and State Governments. This was later to become the Tom Gibson Nature reserve. Tom Gibson was a former owner who kept the block intact and wished it to remain so for conservation purposes. It was Tom Gibson's son who sold the block so it could become a reserve. In 2004 through the regional Forest Agreement process a further 355 ha was added making a total of 1020 ha.

Why reserve?

The reserve is important because the type of dry forest and woodland found in the Midlands has mostly been cleared and, of the remainder, hardly any is reserved.

Botanists have identified the block as being of high conservation significance because of the many rare, threatened and previously unreserved (not known in any State Reserve) plant species. Some of these plants are listed below. The area is also known to be important for the Tasmanian Bettong. Although the Parks and Wildlife Service had identified the purchase of a portion of the remaining Epping Forest as a priority in the early 1980s, it was the lobbying of governments by many organisations and citizens that led to purchase funds being made available. The block is small compared with the estimated 21,000 ha of the original Epping Forest. By 1997 Epping Forest had dwindled to 14% of its size at the time of European settlement.

A Nature Reserve has the same status as a National Park but is usually reserved for outstanding scientific or natural values. Development for active recreation is not the aim in managing such areas.

The types of plants

The plants of conservation significance on this block are orchids, small herbs, sedges and lilies and a couple of prostrate shrubs. Some of them have attractive flowers, but many would go unnoticed by any but the careful and interested observer. Some of them are more common in the dry mallee of Victoria and the western district of NSW. Their occurrence in the

Midlands reflects the low rainfall. Such outlying occurrences are potentially important because of possible genetic differences from the mainland populations of the species.

Management

Some people are puzzled to see an area become a reserve, without being developed with walking tracks, carparks and picnic areas. Others are alarmed to see continued grazing by sheep in an area which was meant to be a refuge for rare plants reserved from farming activity.

It was realised that the plants and vegetation communities that occur on the block have survived for a long time with native and domestic animal grazing and fire. Initial management recommendations were prepared by Dr. Rod Fensham prior to the purchase of the block. He considered that on the more fertile soils there were plants which required grazing. Ideally this role should be carried out by native herbivores but there are complex management problems involved in this course of action. In the meantime, while research is being undertaken, the grazing role is still being carried out by sheep at a similar level to that prior to purchase of the block.

The block is leased to carry up to 300 head of sheep and a requirement of the lease is to maintain existing grazing regimes. Monitoring plots have been set up around the property to determine what future management practices are required to maintain the high plant diversity and survival of the many rare plants.

A draft management plan was written in 1996 that gives an account of the physical and biological features of the block and sets out the long-term management objectives and the prescriptions required to achieve those objectives. An informal advisory committee has been formed.

Further information

If you want further information on aspects of the reserve please contact:

Ranger, Tamar Field Centre (03) 6336 5391
PO Box 46, Kings Meadows TAS 7249.

Further reading

Fensham, R. (1991). *Management plan case study, Sherwood Bush, Epping Forest, Tasmania*. Ch. 12 In: J.B. Kirkpatrick (Ed.) *Tasmanian Native Bush: A Management Handbook*. Tasmanian Environment Centre. *Tom Gibson Nature Reserve Management Plan October 1996*, Parks and Wildlife Service.

Plant species of conservation significance in Sherwood Bush, Epping Forest

Species known only from this site in Tasmania

Triptilodiscus pygmaeus (common sunray)

Species known only from Epping Forest in Tasmania

Pultenaea humilis (dwarf bush pea)

Species reserved only at Epping Forest in Tasmania

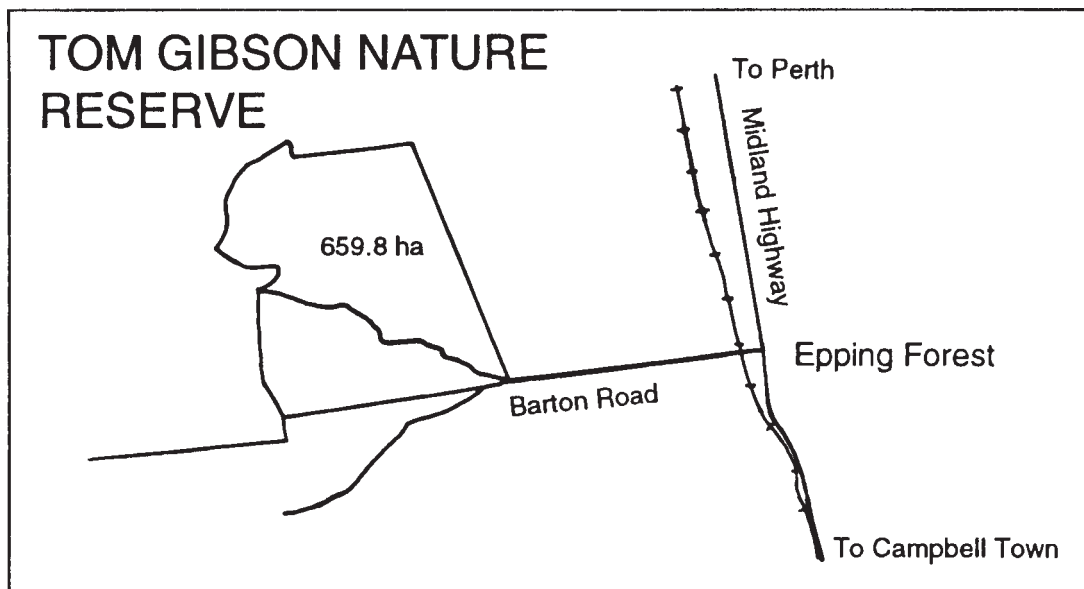
Amphibromus macrorhinus; *Aphelia gracilis* (slender aphelia); *A. pumilio* (dwarf aphelia); *Cyperus tenellus*, *Haloragis heterophylla*, *Hyalosperma demissum*, *Hypoxis vaginata*, *Myriophyllum integrifolium*, *Rutidosis multiflora*.

Other species of significance that are either poorly reserved or rare in Tasmania

Arthropodium minus (small vanilla lily); *A. strictum*; *Ptilotus spathulatus*, (pussy tails); *Caesia parviflora*; (pale grass lily); *Caladenia aff. gracilis*; *Caladenia clavigera*; (clubbed or small spider orchid); *Caladenia fuscata*; *Calochilus imberbis* (beard orchid); *Dichopogon strictus*; (chocolate lily); *Glycine latrobeana*, (dwarf glycine); *Millotia tenuifolia*, (soft millotia); *Opercularia ovata*, *Schoenus absconditus*; *Spyridium vexilliferum*, (winged spyridium); *Stenanthemum pimeleoides*; *Viola hederacea ssp. cleistogama*, (violet).

Things to remember

- Plants, animals and even rocks and fallen timber are protected and should not be removed.
- Fallen timber provides homes and shelter for wildlife and nutrients essential for the recycling process — especially in areas such as Tom Gibson Nature Reserve where the soils are relatively infertile.
- Nature Reserves are protected areas. Guns, dogs and hunting equipment must be left at home.



FURTHER INFORMATION

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