



BUTTONGRASS

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No more 'Sodden Loddons'

Walking on the Frenchmans Cap Track has entered a new era, with the completion of the re-route around the South Loddon Plains, once known as the 'Sodden Loddons', a term which reflected the notoriously muddy track conditions.

The Frenchmans Cap Track leads to the impressive white quartzite dome of Frenchmans Cap (1446 m), the most prominent mountain peak in the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park, a part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The track winds through buttongrass plains, unusual rainforest where Huon pine grows alongside King Billy pine, and spectacular glacial valleys, up to Lake Tahune, perched under the spectacular cliff face of Frenchmans Cap. Most walkers spend between three and five days completing the return trip, a distance of about 46 km.

The milestone was reached five years into a 10 year program of a track upgrade that is the result of a partnership between entrepreneur Dick Smith, the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) and Wildcare Inc.

In 2008, Mr Smith, a frequent visitor to Tasmania, walked the track and as a result, generously offered to donate \$100,000 each year for 10 years towards the upgrade of the Frenchmans Cap Track. An agreement was then struck with the Tasmanian Government which in turn, committed to allocate \$50,000 per year for 10 years, to the project. Mr Smith's donation was made to the Wildcare Gift Fund and detailed planning started for the work.

Work in the early years of the project included upgrading the track through the North Loddon Plains and installing new



Dick Smith had the pleasure of opening the major re-route section to walkers.

duckboard, bridges and drains through boggy sections of track.

Work then moved on to a major component of the upgrade, a 4.6 km re-route around the South Loddon Plains and the lower section of Philips Lead. Last year, a huge effort by a small team pushed through an amazing 1700 m of the last section of the re-route through dense vegetation up to Philips Lead from the tin camp. This was completed in only 19 days in September 2012, without one day lost due to weather! The final 650 m of connecting track out to the North Loddons to join the track sections was completed in February 2013.

Walkers, including Dick Smith, who recently inspected the track, have expressed their appreciation to the PWS on the track construction, which gradually climbs up through the forest, with only a couple of steps in the entire 4.6 km of new track.

Inside this issue

Meet the Parks Fire Crew	2
Changing times for the PWS	3
Eradication on track	3
Crown Land Services	4

Meet the Parks Fire Crew



The Parks Fire Crew monitors a spectacular fire on the coast of Hunter Island, earlier this year.

The 2012-13 fire season in Tasmania will go down as one of the busiest on record. More than 140 PWS staff worked on the fires, moving from one end of the state to the other as they were called to fires. At the core of this effort is the Parks Fire Crew.

The crew of 12 staff is designed to be a resource that backs up regional staff, but during the fire season, they attend almost all fires and then back up with an equal commitment during the planned burning seasons of autumn and spring.

PWS Fire Operations manager Adrian Pyrke said the Fire Crew are among the most experienced and skilled fire fighters in the state, from any agency.

“No other fire fighters have the sheer amount of bushfire fire fighting experience that they do,” Mr Pyrke said.

“Because of that experience, they are able to make a significant difference in controlling fires. A case in point was the fire at Bicheno earlier this year. This started on private property and caused significant property damage. At the same time, from the same lightning storm, we had another fire near Coles Bay, which the Fire Crew attended and put out. If it hadn't been controlled, it too would likely have had similar consequences, for the Coles Bay community.

Not surprisingly, among people whose daily work puts them in the way of danger, the Fire Crew is a tight knit group where every member knows the others' skills and immediately drops into certain roles when the situation requires.

Rod Watson has been with the Fire Crew for nearly 12 years and James Shaw for about 10 years.

Most of the Fire Crew have come from a farming background, where they are comfortable with manual work and machinery such as pumps and chainsaws. Many also have a trade qualification or experience in building, plumbing or metal fabrication, and a large proportion come to the crew with some fire fighting experience as Tasmania Fire Service brigade volunteers.

For those coming into the Fire Crew, the experience level climbs very steeply in their first year due to the sheer number of bushfires and fuel reduction burns attended by the crew.

James said the three key skills sought by the Fire Crew are manual handling, knowledge of machinery and an ability to drop your life (to attend a fire).

All Fire Crew members have to have an arduous fitness rating, which requires a medical clearance and a practical test of strength and endurance. They are the first to be called for remote fires, where they will be dropped into a remote area by helicopter, and must have the skills and



The Parks Fire Crew at a fuel reduction burn on the West Coast earlier this year.

confidence to be self-sufficient and work safely.

During the fire season and into the planned burning season, Fire Crew members go on a fire duty availability roster and they travel from one end of the state to another, attending to bushfires. They have amassed an incredible level of experience with fires in all conditions, and it's given them the confidence to step in and take control of fires at pivotal points.

“It's a bit of a shock to some when they see how actively we will attack a fire,” James said. “Often we will go to a fire line where someone has left it because of the conditions, unwilling to perform what needs to be done. Nine times out of 10 we'll go in there and do the job. We have a lot of confidence in what we can do on the fire line.”

Leadership skills are very important as the Fire Crew members are placed into leadership roles in recognition of their experience and judgement skills.

In the winter months and during quiet fire seasons, the crew is in demand by PWS field centres for their can-do attitude and wide range of building and maintenance skills. They have done road work on Three Hummock Island, built fences on the West Coast, built sections of track at Frenchmans Cap, re-roofed PWS houses and installed new bathrooms and carried in by hand new footbridges to install in the Dial Range. Their tree-felling skills have been in demand on the Three Capes Track, where they have cleared drop-zones for helicopters delivering track construction materials.

Changing times for the PWS

Times are changing for both the PWS and Forestry Tasmania (FT) as a result of the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement signed earlier this year. The implications of this legislation are very significant for the PWS.

The legislation provides for the annual supply of a minimum of 137,000 cubic metres of high quality sawlogs to be made available, and the protection of an additional 504,012 ha of native forests in new reserves. A number of things are happening as part of the legislation's implementation.

Preparation of draft proclamations for the first tranche of reserves has begun. This is a process that will take several years, in accordance with the legislation. The PWS will be consulting with users of these lands to ensure staff work with the community

while making decisions about the provision of facilities and opportunities for current and future users.

Other changes will occur this calendar year, including the following.

As part of the Tasmanian Forests IGA, a new parks and reserves authority will be established. Work is underway on determining the best structure for the authority.

As part of the restructure of FT, the process of splitting FT services into production and non-production activities is under way. About 220,000 ha of Forest Reserves for which FT currently has responsibility, will be transferred to the PWS, in a variety of reserve types. Some FT staff will also move from FT to the PWS as a result of these events.

Eradication on track

This winter marks two years since the completion of aerial baiting on Macquarie Island and signs continue to point to the eradication being a success, with no confirmed signs of rabbits since December 2011.

Three specially trained rodent detection dogs have been on the island since March this year searching for any sign of surviving rats or mice. While the dogs have found many old rat nests and mummified carcasses still hidden in the moss and crevices of the coastal rock stacks, there is no fresh sign of rodents.

Ground hunting teams have now covered more than 65,000 km on foot since August 2011 looking for signs of rabbits and rodents. Intensive sign searching is continuing as a monitoring period of at least two years without any signs of living rabbits or rodents must be completed



Rodent detection dogs Cody, Chase and Bail.



A field of healthy *Pleurophyllum hookeria*.

before the eradication can be considered to have succeeded.

There has also been signs of ecosystem recovery in the absence of rabbits and rodents. In March 2013, long term vegetation monitoring plots were revisited for the first time by DPIPWE botanists. Rapid recovery was noted in some of the most palatable and visible species, such as the megaherbs Macquarie Island cabbage (*Stilbocarpa*), silver-leaf daisy (*Pleurophyllum hookeri*), and tussock grass (*Poa foliosa*). The shield fern (*Polystichum vestitum*), is showing good recovery in the enclosures built six years ago to conserve a 'seed' population.

Macquarie Island's bird life is also recovering. Blue petrels are now breeding in more widespread nests on the island, whereas in the past rat incursions restricted their breeding to offshore stacks. Terns have been seen to be breeding on cobblestone beaches, and grey petrels have had their most successful breeding season since recording of their populations commenced in 2000.

Three Capes Track

Tasmania's spectacular Three Capes Track attraction is well on track, with \$6.7 million committed to the project in this year's State Budget. The Environment, Parks and Heritage Minister, Brian Wightman, said the Tasman Peninsula attraction is due to take its first walkers in November 2015.

"Tasmania is already widely regarded as an inspiring walking destination, and there is little doubt that the completed Three Capes Track will be the jewel in the crown," Mr Wightman said. "The track will weave through one of the world's most scenic areas, and establish itself as one of Australia's best coastal walks."

Mr Wightman said the 2013-14 budget allocation of \$6.7 million represented more than half of the State Government's overall contribution of \$12.8 million. Work started on three portions of the track in February, and seven kilometres are expected to be finished by early spring. Tenders were advertised in late May to construct four more portions, covering 14 km from Denmans Cove to Fortescue Bay.

When complete, the track is expected to inject \$20 million into Tasmania's economy and support 334 direct and indirect jobs.

Increasing Asian market

PWS Tourism Services staff have been working to better understand the emerging Asian market and improve the visitor experience in Tasmania's parks and reserves.

The past several years have seen a significant increase in the number of Asian visitors to Tasmania's national parks, matched by a corresponding increase in the number of commercial operators providing tourism services to this market. Staff met with these operators to understand their business needs and identify barriers to operations. The meetings revealed that clients from Asia want to do tours with operators who hold the required insurances, accreditations and licences. Between 60 to 80 per cent of their clients are international students studying on the mainland, with parents visiting from China.

PWS staff are considering how it can improve the visitor experience for Asian visitors.

Mt Field gallery to showcase hidden gems

When Greg and Rachel Power bought the Waterfalls Cafe at Mt Field National Park six months ago, a photographic gallery was always their goal. On Saturday, 1 June, 2013, their vision became reality when they launched their Waterfalls Cafe Gallery.

Tasmania, and particularly Mt Field, captured the Power family's heart during a nine-week Tasmanian adventure for their travel website GreatAussieRoadTrip.com.au, late in 2011. To their delight, the Waterfalls Cafe became their business, and six months ago, Mt Field National Park became their home.

For Greg, a professional photographer, the opportunity to showcase his work, and that of other talented local photographers, is a dream come true. Artists that will be featured in the gallery include Grant Dixon, Dennis Harding, Wolfgang Glowacki and Simon Olding.

The Powers consider Mt Field National Park to be the ideal location to host this gallery. One of Tassie's most visited national parks, it is considered a hidden gem, with many travellers to the state being aware of Russell Falls, but having little knowledge of the park's hidden secrets, such as rainforests, tall trees and alpine scenery.



A stunning view of the Tarn Shelf at Mt Field. Photo courtesy Greg Powers.

With more than 100,000 visitors to the park each year, only one in five experience the alpine region. Rachel Power said visitors to the waterfalls return to the cafe excited by the animals they have seen and remarking on the beauty of the waterfalls, saying how glad they were to have visited. "Tourists who return from Lake Dobson and the Tarn Shelf always come back with the same comments; 'Wow, that was spectacular, I need more time to explore this

beautiful place',"

Rachel said. The Waterfalls Gallery will mainly feature images from Mt Field National Park, with some images from the nearby Southwest National Park.

"We hope that by showcasing some of the park's hidden gems, we will inspire more people to visit the waterfalls, and then venture further afield while they are here," Rachel said.

Tasmania's land managers join forces

Two of the state's largest land managers, the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) and Crown Land Services (CLS) have joined forces. CLS last year joined the PWS in what manager Andrew Roberts described as 'a natural fit'.

Crown land is 'public land' owned and managed by a number of Government agencies on behalf of the State Government. It includes many strips of land around Tasmania's coastline, and pieces of land set aside for specific purposes, such as road reserves.

Crown land reserved under the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002* is managed by the PWS, State Forests are managed by Forestry Tasmania, and many other agencies manage their own portfolio properties (ie hospitals and schools). The remainder of Crown land is managed under the *Crown Lands Act 1976* and the *Crown Lands Regulations 2011* by Crown Land Services. In a broad sense, the *Crown Lands Act 1976* is a set of rules

on what can and can't be done on Crown land and how Crown land is sold, leased or made available for use under licence.

CLS manages approximately 6,000 existing occupations of Crown land and handles about 1,400 applications for lease, licence or purchase of Crown land at any one time. There are about 20 staff, with most of those in Hobart, as well as property officers in the north and north-west.

Andrew Roberts explained that CLS used to be the government's primary property manager.

"However, over time many of those properties have been transferred to the relevant agency to manage, so what is left now is administering those smaller parcels. Its work is now very similar to the PWS in that they are land managers with many of the same issues," Mr Roberts said.

"For example, with the many marine structures such as jetties, our role is to administer leases and licences so that people have

certainty about their lease or licence. We also handle a lot of access licenses that enable people to gain access to their land through Crown land."

Over the past five years, the Crown Land Assessment and Classification (CLAC) program reviewed thousands of hectares of Crown land and identified about 2,500 parcels to be sold and others to be transferred to councils. About 78,000 ha was identified to be protected in a range of reserves managed by the PWS.

Whales and Seals App

The new PWS Whales and Seals App is the perfect guide to the marine mammals of Tasmania. It has outstanding photographs and drawings, distribution maps, details of biology and stranding records.

The App is available now for download from the iTunes Store.