

PARKS AND PLACES

Tasmanian Wilderness

World Heritage Area



Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania

DEPARTMENT of TOURISM, PARKS
HERITAGE and the ARTS

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (WHA) encompasses a greater breadth of values than any World Heritage property on Earth. From a rich and diverse geoheritage, a unique, often ancient and remarkably intact natural heritage through to a profusion of superlative archaeological and historic heritage sites, the WHA preserves some of the richest and most significant examples of the natural and cultural heritage not only in Australia, but on Earth. Through the World Heritage Convention, the rich natural and cultural heritage within the boundaries of the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA has been identified as being of outstanding significance to all people, for all time.

What is World Heritage?

The World Heritage Convention was established in 1972 by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and is now the most signed environmental convention in the world. Over 170 countries have signed the Convention. It is, in a sense, the modern day equivalent of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World. Unlike the Seven Wonders, of which only the pyramids remain, the World Heritage Convention aims to ensure that World Heritage properties are preserved in perpetuity. It is the purpose of the Convention to promote the protection, and celebration, of the Earth's irreplaceable natural and cultural heritage.

Potential World Heritage Sites are nominated by the national government of the member country. Submissions are subject to rigorous assessment in collaboration with international non-government organisations such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). Only sites deemed to be of outstanding universal value and which satisfy at

least one of four natural and/or six cultural criteria for selection are accepted onto the World Heritage List.

Following inscription on the World Heritage List, the ownership of the property remains unchanged. Listing of a site does not imply international administration or management.

Tasmania's premier position on the World Heritage list

As of 2002, the World Heritage List comprises 721 properties in 124 countries. Of these, 554 are listed for their cultural heritage values, 144 are listed for their natural heritage values and 23 are listed for both natural and cultural values.

Most World Heritage properties satisfy only one or two criteria for inclusion on the list. For example, the greatest example of Mughal architecture, the Taj

Mahal, the world's highest mountain - Mt Everest (Sagarmatha) and Africa's famous Serengeti Plains each satisfy just one or two of the ten criteria. World famous sites such as the Pyramids of Egypt, the Grand Canyon, Stonehenge, the Galápagos Islands and Australia's own Great Barrier Reef satisfy three or four criteria.

Of the total 721 World Heritage properties, the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA is one of only 13 properties that satisfy all natural criteria for selection, and one of only 23 that satisfy both natural and cultural criteria

At the time of listing in 1982, the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area satisfied seven of a possible ten criteria, more than any other World Heritage Site. To date, only one

other World Heritage Site, Mt Taishan in China, listed in 1987, has satisfied as many criteria for inclusion on the World Heritage List.



The World Heritage emblem symbolises the interdependence of cultural and natural heritage: the central square represents Humanity and the circle Nature, the two being intimately linked. The circle is round like the world, but at the same time it is a symbol of protection.

Selection Criteria.

The World Heritage Convention aims to identify and protect the Earth's natural and cultural heritage that is deemed of outstanding universal value. The Criteria against which nominations are measured require that:

As a cultural property each site nominated should :

- i. represent a masterpiece of human creative genius; or*
- ii. exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design; or*
- iii. bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared; or*
- iv. be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history; or*
- v. be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; or*
- vi. be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance*

To meet the natural heritage criteria, sites nominated should:

- i. be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features; or*
- ii. be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals; or*
- iii. contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; or*
- iv. contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation;*

The Tasmania WHA satisfies all four natural criteria and criteria iii, iv and vi of the cultural criteria. Only one other World Heritage property satisfies as many criteria.

Where is the WHA?

The WHA comprises 1.38 million hectares, or about 20% of the State. It combines several National Parks - the Southwest, Hartz Mountains, Wild Rivers, Cradle - Lake St Clair, Mole Creek Karst (part) and Walls of Jerusalem National Parks, as well as other reserves such as Liffey Falls, Farm Cove and Central Plateau Conservation Area.

Other land tenures not managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service are also included within the WHA, such as St Clair Lagoon (HEC), Gordonvale (freehold) and Kuti Kina Cave (Aboriginal ownership). Land tenure or management arrangements are not altered by inclusion on the World Heritage List.

The unique values of the WHA

The WHA encompasses a diverse array of both natural and cultural features, which makes the region of outstanding universal significance to all humankind. The same features led to the listing of the area as a World Heritage property in 1982.

Geology and geomorphology

Within the WHA lies a profusion of complex and well-exposed geological features, the most significant examples of glaciated landscapes in Australia and the most extensive peatlands in the southern hemisphere. The area comprises rocks from all but one geological period, ranging from the oldest Precambrian rocks of the rugged western and south-western ranges which are over a billion years old, to coastal landforms which date back to the end of the last Ice Age, a mere 10,000 years ago. The region is one of the few places in the world where an understanding of climatic change can be gained free from the complications of continental influence. The many ancient mountain rocks studded with marine fossils tell of much earlier periods when this region of the world was beneath a shallow sea.

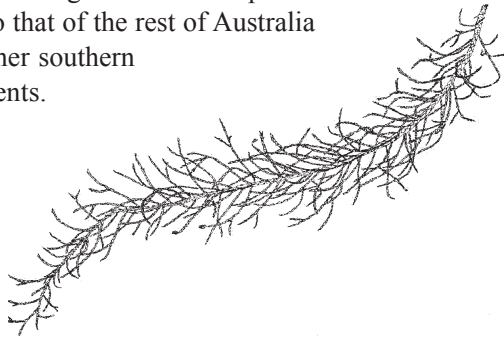
The landscape reveals geomorphological features that represent the tectonic events associated with the separation of the Australian and Antarctic plates during the latter stages of the break-up of the great southern 'supercontinent', Gondwana. The WHA is Australia's stronghold of dolerite formed during the Jurassic, some 170 million years ago, due to the tectonic activity associated with the fragmentation of Gondwana. Subsequent faulting laid the foundations of the dolerite mountains typical of much of the WHA.

The WHA contains some of the deepest and most extensive caves in Australia. Extensive areas of limestone up to 2 km thick and considered some of

the best developed limestone in the world are found in the WHA. The karst (cave) features and the invertebrate fauna that inhabit them are of international significance.

Vegetation

The WHA is rich in habitats containing rare and endemic (found only in Tasmania) plants. The WHA is the Australian stronghold of cool temperate rainforest, a type of forest very different to that usually associated with the term, "rainforest". The most extensive and pristine areas of alpine vegetation in Australia occur within the WHA. These communities differ from the alpine communities of mainland Australia in that the dominant species are shrubs rather than tussock grass and herb-dominant communities of the Australian Alps. Some 60% of the alpine flora is endemic to Tasmania. These plant communities provide living evidence of a remote past in which Tasmania was part of the ancient supercontinent, Gondwana and hold a key to understanding the relationships of the flora to that of the rest of Australia and other southern continents.



The rare Huon pine, famed for its longevity, living for over 3,000 years, occurs almost solely in the west of the WHA. The pencil pines, King Billy pines are also ancient conifers found only in Tasmania.

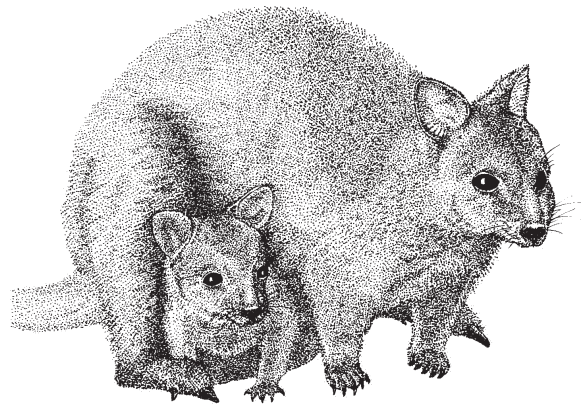
The deciduous beech is the only winter deciduous plant in Australia and is well reserved in the WHA.

Over 160 vascular plant species from a diverse range of families are typically found in buttongrass moorlands. One third of these are endemic to Tasmania.

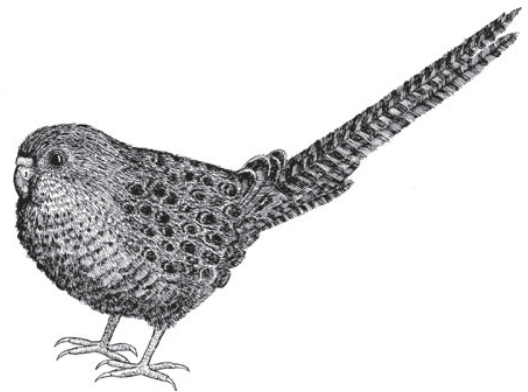
The tallest flowering plant in the world, the swamp gum (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is one of a number of eucalypt species that dominate the sclerophyllous forests of the WHA. This species can grow to heights in excess of 100 m.

Fauna

The WHA acts as a refuge for a number of native mammals that have become extinct on mainland Australia (due to predation by introduced animals such as the fox, and land clearance). Tasmania is the last hope of survival for species such as the eastern barred bandicoot, bettong, pademelon and eastern quoll.



Numerous birds are protected within the WHA. The ground parrot finds sanctuary within the buttongrass moorlands of the WHA, while the only two other species of ground nesting parrots in the world are both on the verge of extinction. The wedge-tail eagle, a sub-species of the mainland bird and endangered in Tasmania, is found within the region. The endangered orange-bellied parrot, of which less than 200 individuals remain, breeds solely within the southwest corner of the WHA, while the few remaining individuals of the highly endangered *Pedder galaxias*



(a species of freshwater fish) are restricted to a single lake. The remarkable Pedra Branca skink, with a population of only 600 individuals, is confined to the tiny rock island, Pedra Branca, some 30 km off the south-east tip of the State. The island is incorporated within the boundaries of the World Heritage Area. Nineteen rare and threatened vertebrates have been so far identified within the boundaries of the WHA. This represents 80% of such species in Tasmania.

The fauna of the WHA also shows a high degree of endemism, with many groups revealing links with the ancient Gondwana. The most ancient representative of the crustaceans, the mountain shrimp (*Anaspides*) and the unique velvet worm (*Peripatus spp.*), inhabit the WHA. The latter species is considered a 'missing link' between the annelids (worms) and the arthropods (crustaceans and insects). Many invertebrates that are internationally recognised as threatened, such as the velvet worm, are found within the WHA.

Bizarre creatures, known as sea pens, are found in the remote waterways of the WHA. These feather-like cnidarians are normally associated with deep water, but due to the tannin-stained waters of the south-west, they occur in very shallow water in this area.

Aboriginal heritage

The WHA is rich in cultural diversity, with some of the richest and best preserved archaeological deposits known in Australia. Examples of some of the earliest known forms of art, in the form of Aboriginal hand stencils, lie within caves deep in the heart of the WHA. Caves and rock shelters, as well as a profusion of coastal middens and stone scatters, bear testimony to the Aboriginal people who lived in the area during the height of the last Ice Age — the most southerly humans on Earth.

European heritage

The wilderness has never really been an untrodden land — as Aboriginal occupation over at least the last 36,000 years clearly demonstrates. The region is similarly rich in European history. The earliest of Tasmania's penal settlements, Sarah Island,

represents a dark chapter in the history of colonisation which was to have an impact on the Tasmanian psyche for generations to come. Piners, prospectors and trappers who extracted the resources of the region have all carved out a legacy within the wilderness of Tasmania.

Other values

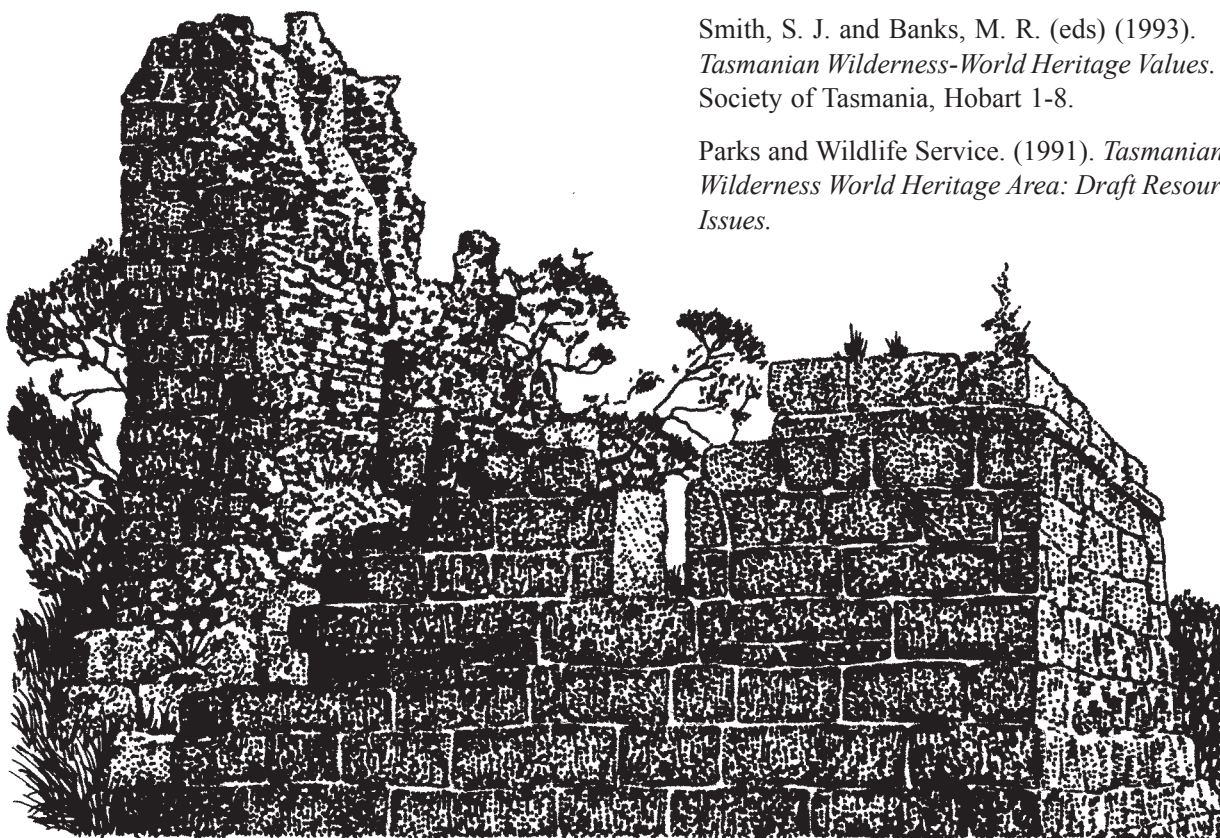
Although not a part of the criteria for selection as a World Heritage Site, there are, of course, many other values associated with the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Those seeking to escape from an increasingly artificial urban world find solace within the remote and silent grandeur of its mountains. Others enjoy the area as a magnificent backdrop to outdoor recreation activities, such as bushwalking, rock climbing or rafting. Many people just enjoy an easy stroll along one of the many fine short walks easily available to all visitors.

For all people who visit the Tasmanian Wilderness there is the opportunity to be deeply touched by the experience. Indeed, the values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area extend far beyond those that led to its listing as a World Heritage Site, for its values extend far beyond those that can be assessed in words.

Further information

Smith, S. J. and Banks, M. R. (eds) (1993). *Tasmanian Wilderness-World Heritage Values*. Royal Society of Tasmania, Hobart 1-8.

Parks and Wildlife Service. (1991). *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area: Draft Resources and Issues*.



FURTHER INFORMATION

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