

POPULATIONS OF TASMAN PENINSULA

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(with four tables and four text-figures)

Understanding of the characteristics and dynamics of the population permanently resident in Tasman municipality has to recognise that the area receives numerically large influxes of both recreational and tourist groups. Census data suggest that the economy of the peninsula is undergoing a major shift from one reliant on traditional primary industries to one focused on tourism. At the same time, the amenities of the natural landscape have prompted a substantial in-migration of non-conventional lifestyles.

Key Words: Tasman Peninsula, population, counterurbanisation, alternative communities, holiday homes, tourism.

From SMITH, S.J. (Ed.), 1989: *IS HISTORY ENOUGH? PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE USE OF THE RESOURCES OF TASMAN PENINSULA*. Royal Society of Tasmania, Hobart: 139–148.

INTRODUCTION

Censuses, the main mechanism for gathering information about the population of an area, focus attention on long-term trends in the numbers and characteristics of permanently resident populations. This focus is important in that, *inter alia*, it provides a proxy measure of changes in the social and economic structure of a region. For Tasman Peninsula, however, to focus solely on the permanent population would be to ignore other groups of people that are of major importance to the economy of the region. Not only does the peninsula provide permanent living space for just over 1000 people, but it also has holiday homes that give recreational accommodation for perhaps twice that number on a less regular basis. On a still shorter temporal scale, the peninsula is a major destination for tourists in Tasmania and there is a large daily throughput of visitors. Any examination of the population geography of the peninsula must make reference to all three groups, since the *raison d'etre* of the permanent population rests, to an increasing degree, on the provision of goods, services and labour for the other two groups.

THE PERMANENT POPULATION

Numbers and Distribution

In common with many other rural areas in the state, Tasman Peninsula has had a fluctuating population in

the postwar period, with a gradual rise in numbers to the mid 1960s, followed by a decade of decline and then a further increase into the 1980s (table 1; unless otherwise stated, all population statistics reported in this paper are from ABS sources). Without specific surveys, the reasons for these changes can only be

TABLE 1
Resident Population, Tasman Municipality,
1947–91

	Resident population at census date	Absolute change	% change
1947	1039		
1954	1079	+40	3.9
1961	1108	+29	2.6
1966	1126	+18	1.6
1971	1035	-91	-8.0
1976	970	-65	-6.2
1981	1080	+110	11.3
1986*	1240	+160	14.8
1991*	1390	+150	12.0

* Forecasts reported by Department of Industrial Development, *Residential population forecasts for Tasmania 1981-1996, Part 2: The regions*. January 1984. Other figures are from ABS sources.



FIG. 1 — Population distribution, Tasman municipality, 1981.

inferred, but they reflect fundamental changes in the economy of the region and some broader societal trends.

The decline in numbers over the decade from 1966 coincided with a period of increasing financial stress in many agricultural industries. On the peninsula, orcharding, an industry that had formed an important and particularly labour-intensive sector of the agricultural economy was badly affected. Reasons for the downturn in orcharding, which affected the state as a whole, are summarised elsewhere (Wood 1982). For Tasman municipality it is

sufficient to note that between 1966 and 1976, the number of commercial orchards declined from 39 to 13, the number of apple trees from 93 000 to 57 700 and apple production from 5156 tonnes to 2508 tonnes. Production of pears, which had been important on the peninsula, declined by a greater amount. Aided by further incentives to withdraw from orcharding, the decline has continued through to the present. By 1984/85, the number of commercial orchards in Tasman municipality was no longer being published separately: there were only 37 000 apple trees and production had dropped to 2443 tonnes. The absence

of any substantial new ventures in farming in Tasman municipality and the labour-shedding nature of most innovations in agriculture must have contributed to the decline in population in the decade to 1976.

The increase in population, first evident for Tasman municipality in the 1981 census, matches the trend that has become evident in most parts of the western world over recent years. Commonly termed the "population turnaround", it involves rising numbers in small towns and agricultural localities reversing the previous, fairly consistent, trend of population loss from such areas for a long period of time. There is ongoing debate about the causes of the turnaround (see for example, Hugo & Smailes 1985). Some have attempted to link it to new communication and transportation technologies that have allowed very extensive urban commuting fields, and others to structural changes in modern western economies. Any satisfactory explanation almost certainly requires recourse to several causative factors but the most appealing in the context of Tasman Peninsula is that the turnaround reflects a basic change in some peoples' values and lifestyle preferences in favour of rural or small town environments. There can be no doubt that the physical characteristics of the peninsula, including a coastline that varies from spectacular cliffs to sheltered beaches and extensive areas of bushland, in addition to the widespread historical associations have made the area attractive to new settlers. As is discussed later, these settlers have included some seeking an amenable environment for eventual retirement and others who wish to pursue a non-conventional lifestyle. For both groups, the availability of portable social benefits in the form of pensions and unemployment payments has been important. This, combined with relatively cheap land prices, in themselves a reflection of depression in the agricultural sector, has made Tasman Peninsula an attractive proposition as a place for permanent residence.

Figure 1 portrays the distribution of population on the peninsula in 1981. It is readily apparent that large areas have no permanent habitation. Indeed, most of the thickly forested country east of the Arthur Highway and around Mounts Koonya and Clarke, the exposed coastal fringe between Port Arthur Bay and Wedge Bay, and the drier sandy areas in the northwest of the peninsula have at best ever only supported a transient population. The majority of the population lives in the small centres of Taranna, Port Arthur and Nubeena, with the rest mainly dispersed at low density along the north coast and along the roads linking the north coast with Nubeena and the latter with Port Arthur. Of the centres, Nubeena has become the most important, showing a growth in

population of 6.5% between 1971 and 1976, at a time when the Tasman population as a whole was declining, and a further growth from 1976 to 1981. By any standards, however, it remains a small centre with only slightly over 200 people in 1981.

Observation and local discussion suggest that two changes may have begun to emerge in this pattern since 1981. Firstly, there has been the development of several small but, by local standards, significant concentrations of alternative lifestyles — the most notable in the valley south of Koonya. Secondly, there has been considerable construction of permanent homes along the Eaglehawk Neck/Taranna road and along parts of White Beach.

Demographic Characteristics

There is more to the study of populations than numbers and distribution and, in this section, some of the characteristics of the Tasman population including age, mobility, occupations and incomes are examined. It should be noted at the outset that it is commonly difficult to identify firm trends in such small populations. This is partly because numerically small differences, that in themselves may reflect random variations in, for example, birth rates or migration patterns, assume considerable apparent significance when expressed in percentage terms.

Figure 2 shows the age/sex distribution for Tasman municipality in 1976 and 1981 superimposed on that for the state in 1981. In 1976, the peninsula's population showed a general under-representation of most cohorts below the age of 45 and an over-representation of older age groups. By 1981, these deviations, which are common to many rural areas, were still apparent, but growth in population over the intercensal period had brought the percentage shares of the younger cohorts closer to the state levels. At the same time, however, the top heavy nature of the pyramid was maintained. By 1981, some 13.9% of the state population was aged over 59 compared with 17.6% of the Tasman population. By July 1986, 130 Tasman residents were receiving an age pension, compared to 98 at the time of the 1976 census (Hepper 1979). Almost half lived in or near Nubeena and almost half were older than 74 years (unpublished data, Department of Social Security).

In part, the relative absence of younger age groups reflects the paucity of local employment opportunities — a feature that has been enhanced by the decline of the agricultural sector. Young people seeking a place in the workforce have had to move elsewhere. Such moves have probably been promoted by the fact that most students requiring anything more

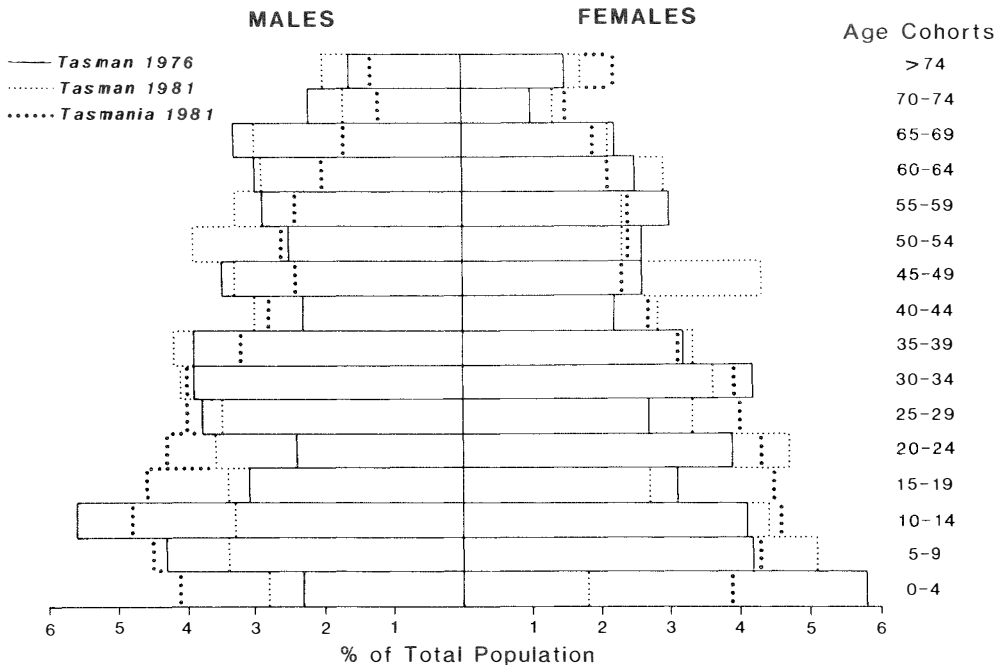


FIG. 2 — Age-sex distribution of the Tasman population in 1976 and 1981, and of the Tasmanian population in 1981.

than a basic high school education, have had to leave home at age 16 or earlier. Accompanying such absences come familiarity with, and possibly preference for, a different and basically urban lifestyle. Whatever the reasons, the net effect in 1981 was an under-representation of younger groups and an over-representation of older groups. Both of these trends, should they have continued since 1981, may have implications for social service infrastructures, from schools at one of the spectrum to systems for care of the elderly at the other.

Enumerations of populations at specific points in time and intercensus comparisons can, of course, mask considerable change in the interim. There is, for example, no guarantee that the elderly population in 1981 comprised the same individuals who made up the elderly or near elderly in 1976. It is in this area of population movements that some of the most interesting trends, only barely visible in the 1981 census figures, are occurring in Tasman municipality.

The 1976 and 1981 censuses required people to indicate where they were living one and five years

previously. Table 2 presents these data for Tasmania, Tasman and the four collectors' districts that comprise the municipality; in both years they suggest that the Tasman population as a whole has been less mobile than the state population. In 1981, for example, 55% of the state population was in the same residence as five years earlier. The corresponding figure for Tasman was 59.1%.

An interesting and perhaps indicative feature is apparent for collectors' district 3, which covers an area from Koonya and Taranna in the north to Port Arthur and Stormlea in the south. Table 2 figures show an unusually low percentage resident in the same dwelling in 1980 as in 1981. Almost a quarter of the 276 residents in 1981 had changed place of residence over the previous year. Most had moved to the peninsula from other parts of Tasmania, whilst the newcomers also included people from N.S.W., Victoria and the A.C.T.

More recent census data are not available to indicate whether this in-migration has continued. Local discussions, however, suggest that an in-

TABLE 2

Comparison of Residential Mobility, for Tasmanian and Tasman Peninsula Residents, as Recorded in 1976 and 1981 Censuses

		Same residence	Other residence in same LGA	Other LGA in Tasmania	Elsewhere*
<i>1976 — Location of usual residence in (a) 1975 and (b) 1971 (%)</i>					
Tasmania	(a)	83.1	5.5	6.4	5.0
	(b)	55.0	12.3	16.6	16.1
Tasman LGA	(a)	85.4	2.7	6.6	5.3
	(b)	68.7	5.5	12.4	13.4
Collectors' District	1 (a)	89.1	0.7	7.6	2.6
	(b)	74.2	2.7	10.3	12.8
	2 (a)	82.8	1.0	9.2	7.0
	(b)	66.6	11.0	7.7	14.7
	3 (a)	83.6	6.7	5.9	3.8
	(b)	66.4	4.0	15.9	13.7
	4 (a)	84.2	2.4	2.4	11.0
	(b)	63.4	7.3	17.0	12.3
<i>1981 — Location of usual residence in (c) 1980 and (d) 1976 (%)</i>					
Tasmania	(c)	82.8	5.8	6.4	5.0
	(d)	55.0	12.8	16.6	15.6
Tasman LGA	(c)	84.7	1.3	6.1	7.9
	(d)	59.1	5.1	21.8	14.0
Collectors' District	1 (c)	87.7	1.5	5.4	5.4
	(d)	56.6	5.7	24.3	13.4
	2 (c)	89.2	0.0	2.1	8.7
	(d)	74.9	2.6	16.2	6.3
	3 (c)	76.8	1.8	11.6	9.8
	(d)	56.8	5.4	19.6	18.2
	4 (c)	87.2	1.8	4.3	6.7
	(d)	48.8	6.0	26.5	18.7

* "Elsewhere" includes "not stated" and "not applicable".

movement of individuals with particular lifestyle aspirations has continued fairly strongly. Many of the newer residents are following what can be described as alternative or non-conventional lifestyles. The people involved have very varied origins, aspirations and motivations but generally they appear to share a desire for a simple, independent life, and

most have a high concern for environmental issues.

The major concentration of alternative lifestyles is in the Cascades Valley south of Koonya. Beginning with the purchase of a dairy farm by three families in the mid-1970s, the community has grown rapidly and, by 1986, 260 ha of forested land has been settled. Many own the land on which they live;

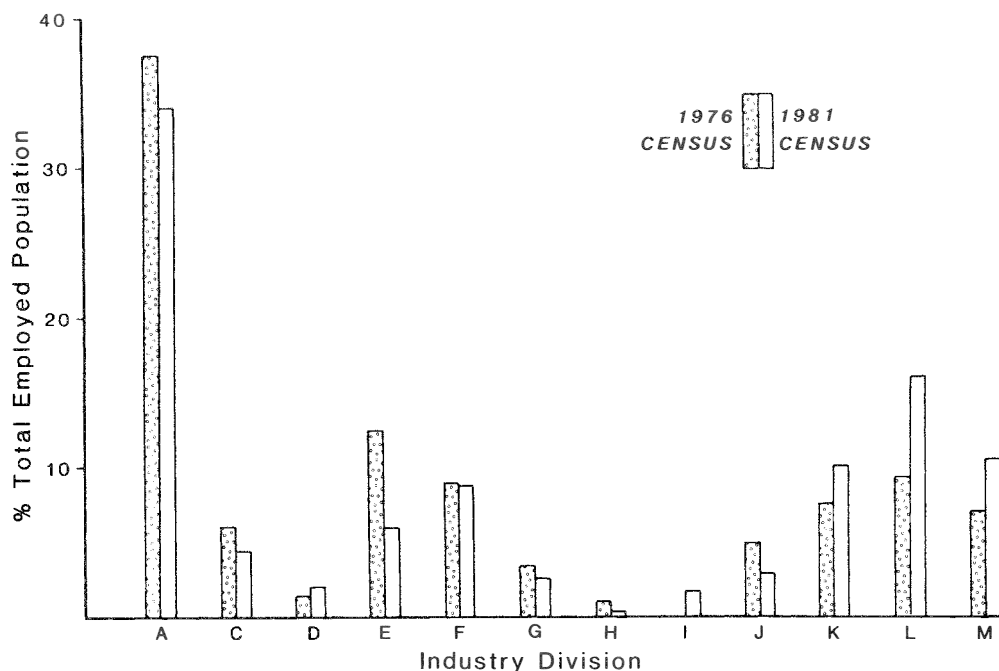


FIG. 3 — Employment by industry, Tasman municipality 1976 and 1981. The main industries included in each division are as follows: A — agriculture, forestry, fishing; C — manufacturing; D — electricity, gas, water; E — construction; F — wholesale, retail trade; G — transport and storage; H — communications; I — finance; J — public administration; K — community services; L — entertainment, recreation, hotels, restaurants; M — other. No employees in division B — mining were recorded at either census.

most have built or are building their own homes; some work or wish to work, whilst others are content to live on social security. By February 1986, the valley and its immediate surrounds contained 61 people (44 adults and 17 children) who considered themselves as part of the new community. Most of the adults are between 22 and 50 years in age with the average near 30. Of the children, 12 are below school age, indeed most are less than 2 years old. Elsewhere on the peninsula, smaller concentrations of alternative lifestyles occur in the Stormlea/Highcroft area (about 10 adults and 5 children) and near Mt Communication (about 12 people). A further 12 people following similar lifestyles live at scattered locations across the peninsula, giving a total of about 100. Whilst the absolute number is small, it is significant in local terms, comprising about 10% of the total 1981 population for the municipality.

Signs of restructuring that has been occurring in the Tasman economy in recent years are evident

from industry of employment data (fig. 3). From 1976 to 1981, the employed population grew from 365 to 500. The clear dominance of the traditional primary industries of agriculture, forestry and fishing is readily apparent, yet this sector lost ground over the intercensal period. The two identifiable divisions that recorded substantial increases in percentage share of total employment were community services, including health and education and, most notably, activities related to tourism, particularly restaurants and hotels. The latter undoubtedly reflects the large growth in the tourist trade which occurred in the late 1970s (see below). Although tourism has long been a feature of the peninsula, the development, mainly along the approach road to Port Arthur, of local commercial enterprises that capitalise on the tourist dollar is relatively recent. Other statistics, referred to later, show that tourist-related employment has continued to grow into the 1980s. The industry statistics, then, give a picture of a changing economy in which the

TABLE 3

Household Incomes, Tasman Municipality and Tasmania, 1981

Household income (\$ p.a.)	Tasman %	Tasmania %
0-4000	14.9	9.3
4001-8000	26.6	15.9
8001-12000	10.2	13.6
12001-18000	16.2	19.8
18001-26000	10.9	18.2
over 26000	6.0	14.6
Not stated	15.2	8.5
	100.0	100.0

TABLE 4

Increase in the Number of Holiday Homes at Individual Locations in Tasman Municipality, 1960 to 1977*

Location	Number of holiday homes	
	1960	1970
Eaglehawk Neck**	23	100
Blow Hole Road	27	33
Taranna	4	32
Sloping Main	1	36
Coal Mines area	0	24
Stewarts Bay	0	18
Port Arthur	2	38
Safety Cove	0	19
Nubeena	6	39
White Beach	13	73
Total Tasman	76	412
Total Tasmania	3800	7316

* Source: Thorne (1977).

** Not all of these shacks are in Tasman municipality.

traditionally important sources of employment based on the natural resources of the land and sea are losing ground to tourism-related jobs.

As a final comment on the characteristics of the permanently resident population, some reference to incomes is appropriate (table 3). By comparison with the state as a whole, household incomes in Tasman municipality (defined as the combined incomes of all household members aged 15 years or over) show an over-representation of low incomes and an under-representation of the higher income brackets. In 1981, for example, more than half of Tasman households earned less than \$12 000 p.a., compared with a corresponding figure for the state of 38.8%. Such features are common for rural areas in general and reflect, *inter alia*, rural-urban wage differentials and the more self-sufficient lifestyles of many country households. With the substantial increase in the alternative lifestyles population since 1981, one would expect that the 1986 census will show a greater proportion of low-income households.

THE RECREATIONAL POPULATION

For many reasons, including increased affluence and mobility, changing recreational preferences, the imposition of stricter building codes in municipalities close to Hobart and the availability of attractive coastal sites at relatively low prices, Tasman Peninsula has become one of the major growth areas for shacks (holiday homes) in Tasmania. During the period from 1960 to 1977, the number of shacks in the state almost doubled whilst those on the peninsula increased by more than five times. Table 4 shows the rates of growth for individual settlements. Although more recent figures are not readily available, the number of shacks at White Beach, now the largest collection of holiday homes on the peninsula, has more than doubled since 1977. It seems reasonable to estimate that there are currently well over 600 shacks in Tasman municipality, the majority of which are owned by people from Hobart (Thorne 1977).

The durations of usage of holiday homes in Tasmania have not been researched though, typically, they are used for long spells during school summer holidays and at weekends and holidays in spring and autumn. Evidence from the U.S.A. suggests an occupancy of summer cottages of about 53 days p.a. with wide deviations around the mean (Coppock 1977). Using this figure for Tasman, and assuming 600 shacks with users in groups of four, gives an estimate of about 127 000 person-nights p.a. This is sufficient to swell the population of the peninsula by about 350 people for every day of the year or, more

realistically, to double the permanent population for about four months of the year.

Such a population influx must have a substantial effect on the local economy, providing custom for local retail outlets and tradespeople involved in shack construction and repair and a substantial rates contribution to the local council. In addition, evidence from elsewhere in Australia shows that a substantial number of purchasers buy or construct second homes with retirement as a primary reason for acquisition (Robertson 1977). Some second-home sites on the peninsula, particularly in the Eaglehawk Neck, Taranna, Port Arthur and Nubeena areas, already show signs of permanent occupancy. Familiarisation with the amenities of peninsula life through initially casual recreational usage of shacks may contribute to growth of the permanent population in the future.

THE TOURIST POPULATION

Estimates of the number of tourists visiting the peninsula are at best vague. The only data source with any semblance of continuity is the record of tickets sold for entry to the Visitor Centre at Port Arthur (fig. 4A). It shows a steady rise in sales to a peak in 1979/80 when almost 120 000 people paid to enter the centre. Since then admissions have fallen to around 90 000 visitors p.a. Translating these figures into an estimate of total tourist numbers is problematical. One source (National Parks and Wildlife Service 1985) suggests that only about two-thirds of visitors to Port Arthur pay to enter the centre, hence ticket sales need to be increased by 50% to give an estimate of total visitors. On this basis, in the peak year of 1979/80 almost 180 000 tourists visited Port Arthur and current levels are around 135 000 p.a. Intuitively one suspects that as estimates of the numbers of tourists visiting the *peninsula* as a whole, these figures are conservative. Whilst Port Arthur is the major draw card for interstate and overseas visitors, many Tasmanians visit other parts of the peninsula on a short-term basis.

Nevertheless, if the current level of approximately 135 000 tourists p.a. is taken as realistic, this volume is sufficient to increase the population of the peninsula by almost 370 per day throughout the year. There is, however, a distinct seasonality in tourist traffic (fig. 4B) and it is more valid to assume visitors to the order of 500 plus per day in the December to May period and lower numbers in the remainder of the year. It should be noted that the local economic impact of these visitors is limited by the fact that the

vast majority (around 80% according to some estimates) spend only a part of a day on the peninsula.

The significance of the tourist trade for the peninsula has already been discussed. More recent figures suggest that about 150 people are employed in tourism-related jobs by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), accommodation establishments and larger privately developed attractions, during the main tourist season from September to early June (NPWS 1985). Most jobs are held by local residents and most, given the seasonality of visitors, are casual. *Inter alia*, maintenance or increase in this level of employment will depend on the future of the Port Arthur restoration scheme and the success of moves to encourage tourists to stay longer on the peninsula.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In terms of understanding the dynamics of the peninsula as a place where people live and work, clearly it is necessary to consider more than just the permanently resident population. As has been shown, for a substantial proportion of each year, permanent residents are outnumbered by influxes of tourist and recreational populations. Whilst such influxes are common in many coastal municipalities in Tasmania, the unique attraction of Port Arthur probably means that visitor populations are at their largest in Tasman municipality. Two particular features emerge from this discussion of populations on the peninsula.

Firstly, the industry of employment statistics give a strong indication of an economy that is gradually undergoing a basic transformation from one reliant on traditional primary activities to one in which tourism-related jobs are of major significance. Whilst tourism is commonly hailed as the salvation for many depressed economies, the place of Tasman Peninsula in Australia's history must surely give it an edge in competition for the tourist dollar. It seems likely that the transformation towards a tourism-based economy will continue. The effectiveness of this process, however, depends on a long-term, carefully structured and sensitive management of the area's publicly and privately owned historical resources.

Secondly, the presence of relatively large and apparently rapidly growing alternative communities on the peninsula has some implications for the future. The lifestyle aspirations of these groups mean that they have tended to gravitate to areas that were previously only used as bush runs or for sporadic timber extraction. Typically these areas have low

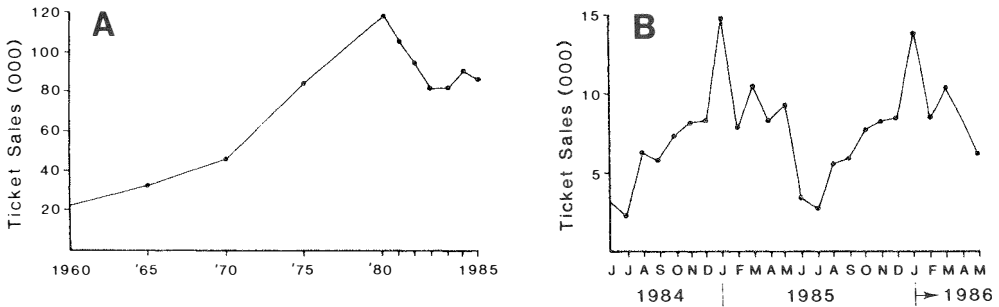


FIG. 4 — (A) Numbers of tickets sold for admission to the Visitor Centre at Port Arthur, 1960–86; from 1979/80, figures refer to financial years. The June 1986 figure was estimated as the average of the previous two June figures. (B) Numbers of tickets sold for admission to the Visitor Centre at Port Arthur, by month, June 1984 to May 1986. Source: Unpublished data, National Parks and Wildlife Service.

levels of infrastructural provision (in the form of, for example, hydro connection). As a consequence, land values have been low and, once a group has become established, this appears to have acted as a deterrent to potential conventional land purchasers. Despite some turnover, the current settlements show every sign of permanence and it is possible that similar settlements will occur in other parts of the peninsula — certainly there is no lack of unserviced, semi-natural bush and forested land. Whether or not new settlements do develop, the natural growth of the existing communities is likely to ensure that the non-conventional lifestylers will comprise an increasing proportion of the permanently resident population. From local accounts, the new and long-established populations currently appear to co-exist in harmony. Whether this will continue as numbers grow to a level at which the alternative groups, with their often unconventional views, can influence local politics, and as children from the new settlements feed into the education system, remains to be seen.

Developments of the historical assets of the peninsula, then, are likely to continue to produce a restructuring of the economic base of the area whilst the high amenity value of the natural landscape is

likely to generate a much more varied social mix within the resident population than has hitherto been apparent.

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