

Landscape and Man

WEST COAST TOURISTS AND TOURIST RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

Most tourists visit the West Coast for a day or two as part of the round Tasmania circuit. They are attracted by the scenery and past and present mining activity. In 1974 tourists spent approximately one and a half million dollars in the area, over half of this total being spent in Queenstown. Each dollar spent by tourists generates an extra thirty-nine cents in local income, with the greatest increases in local income resulting from tourist spending in labour-intensive, locally owned and supplied business establishments. Tourism is unlikely to provide an alternative economic base to mining unless local attitudes and the magnitude of government assistance change significantly.

INTRODUCTION

The West Coast region of Tasmania is characterised by two major features which make the area particularly interesting for tourists both from inter and intra-State. The average tourist is attracted to the area by the spectacular scenery and the possibilities of encountering contemporary and historical evidence of mining activities. The area is, in Tasmanian terms, isolated.

In fact until the mid 1960's there was no road link between Rosebery and Burnie. The people of the West Coast focus more towards Burnie and, until recent years, Melbourne than they do to Hobart. There is little population located outside the major towns of Zeehan, Rosebery, Queenstown, Strahan and Gormanston.

This article will consider the tourism patterns on the West Coast within the context of Tasmanian tourism patterns, and the probable future of the West Coast as a tourist area. A detailed account of the economic structure of tourism in the area can be found in Smith and Wilde (1976).

Tasmanian Tourism Patterns

The West Coast situation can be put into context if we first analyse tourism patterns in Tasmania. Throughout Australia there is very little known of the movement patterns of both local and interstate travellers and visitors. For example a recent study in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales used several methods to estimate the number of people visiting the area. Estimates ranged from 234,000 to 1.8 million. (New South Wales Tourism Dept. 1973). A similar situation exists in Tasmania. We do not even know to the nearest 10,000 how many mainland holiday visitors come to our State each year. As a consequence it is very difficult to estimate the number of visitors to any particular region. A recent survey showed that approximately 65 per cent of visitors from the mainland stay more than 8 days (Tasmanian Tourist Council 1974). Most of these travel around the State, and include the West Coast in their itineraries. Until recently most mainland visitors travelled by coaches. However, there are an increasing number of tourists bringing their own vehicles or hiring vehicles when they get to Tasmania.

WESTERN TASMANIAN TOURIST PATTERNS

The average mainland tourist spends close to 1.5 nights in the area (Tasmanian Tourist Council 1974). This figure has increased from 1.2 nights three years ago and is likely to increase further in the near future. Queenstown, with its devastated landscape and Mt. Lyell mine tours provides the main focus of tourism activity

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accounting for 59 per cent of tourist spending (Table 12). There are approximately 500 hotel and motel beds in Queenstown (Table 13). There is some accommodation in the town of Zeehan. Most tourists visit this town and inspect the Zeehan Mining and Railway Museum. The township of Strahan on Macquarie Harbour is particularly popular in the summer months when a large motor launch takes visitors on cruises of Macquarie Harbour and up the Gordon River. Rosebery to the north provides little tourist accommodation with most tourists just staying for lunch or stopping for petrol.

Table 12

TOURIST SPENDING 1975 (\$'000)*

Town	Accommodation Establishments	Other Establishments	Total
Queenstown	805.9	119.2	925.1
Strahan	120.0	186.0	306.0
Zeehan	136.7	83.8	220.5
Rosebery	<u>42.1</u>	<u>65.9</u>	<u>108.0</u>
Total	1104.7	454.9	1559.6

*Smith and Wilde (1977)

Table 13

BEDS AVAILABLE IN ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS IN WESTERN TASMANIA, DECEMBER 1976*

Town	Motels	Hotels	Other	Total
Queenstown	386	91	14	491
Strahan	-	32	32	64
Zeehan	72	48	-	120
Rosebery	<u>-</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>35</u>
Total	458	206	46	710

*Tasmanian Travelways, February-March 1977.

It is difficult to accurately assess the number of people visiting the West Coast each year. Detailed information on hotel and motel occupancy figures is not available. A similar situation exists with camping and caravanning. The most reliable estimates can be based upon visitor figures for the Zeehan Museum. The Curator of this Museum has accurate figures on the number of coaches visiting the Museum. However, it is difficult to assess what proportion of those visiting the Museum actually sign the Visitors Book. It is likely that at least 180,000 people visited the West Coast in 1974 with in excess of 200,000 people in 1976. This estimate is consistent with estimates based on Government Tourist Bureau bookings.

Bureau of Statistics occupancy figures give 76.6% occupancy in January 1976 and 34.1% in June 1976. The general accommodation capacity constraint throughout Tasmania is accentuated on the West Coast - the accommodation bottleneck of the around Tasmania circuit. In fact, two years ago local accommodation establishment proprietors combined to advertise on the radio for people not to come to the area unless they were assured of accommodation.

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF TOURISM

While tourists spend over one and a half million dollars per annum on the West Coast (Table 12), the economic benefits to the region far exceed this figure. The regional multiplier is 1.37 (Smith and Wilde 1977). Thus, each dollar spent by tourists generates an extra thirty-nine cents in local income. The multiplier varies between municipalities with Strahan having the highest multiplier (1.48) and

Queenstown the smallest (1.33).

In general, spending in relatively small, locally owned labour intensive enterprises (as are dominant at Strahan for example) most benefits the economy of the region, while larger, externally controlled establishments such as hotel chains and coach and hire car companies are usually less integrated within the local economy. Important as high quality motels are for tourism, perhaps greater encouragement should be given to the development of other types of accommodation, such as guest houses and small bed and breakfast establishments.

The wider the variety of local enterprises that can be encouraged to establish in the region, the greater will be the local impact of any increase in tourist numbers or spending as local businesses will be able to obtain supplies locally rather than from outside.

It is inevitable that the leakage from the small regional economy of western Tasmania will be high, so that some of the multiplier effect will be passed on to the economies of other regions, especially in the Burnie region. Given this interdependence of regional economies within Tasmania it would seem reasonable that State funds should be used to meet some of the costs associated with tourism.

THE FUTURE OF TOURISM IN WESTERN TASMANIA

If the Queenstown Mine were to close tomorrow would tourism provide a viable alternative economic base for the West Coast? In the short term this would be highly unlikely because it would be dependent upon a significant change in attitudes on the part of entrepreneurs, Government, local people and tourists. For example, a significant number of local businessmen would agree with the statement made to the author in 1972 to the effect that "tourists are of no value to my business because buses arrive after my shop is closed." Until the Government provides more than \$750,000 of State Loan Funds for tourism ventures, development will be significantly constrained not only in western Tasmania, but throughout the State.

Finally, the Tasmanian Tourist Council has been unable to get sufficient local support to enable them to prepare a local tourism brochure on Queenstown. We have gone a long way backwards since the days of the West Coast Tourism Committee and their 1908 pictorial guide for tourists (Judd 1908). Despite this pessimistic outlook tourists are still going to come to the region. We need to encourage them to stay longer, by providing more intermediate type accommodation, obtaining information from those who have lived in the area for decades, educating local people to welcome tourists, providing easily accessible audio-visual presentations indicating local points of interest and through the provision of an accessible high-level vantage point such as Mount Read.

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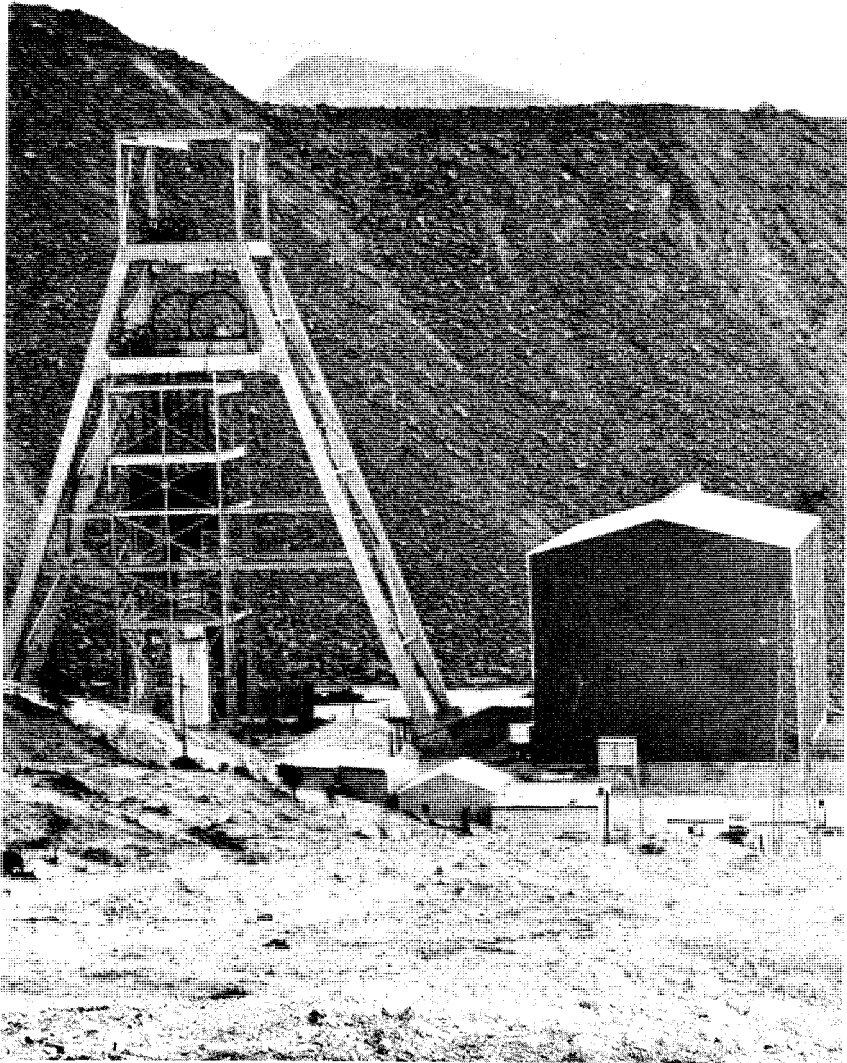


PLATE 21. - Slagheap and mining works at Queenstown.