

Conserving Cultural Values in Australian
National Parks and Reserves,
with Particular Reference to the
Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

by
Simon Cubit
BEd (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Geography and Environmental Studies
University of Tasmania
Australia

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.



Simon Cubit

This thesis may be made available for loan. Copying of any part of this thesis is prohibited for two years from the date this statement was signed; after that time limited copying is permitted in accordance with the *Copyright Act 1968*.

© Simon Cubit



Abstract

Beginning in the 1970s and extending into the 1990s community groups, academics and cultural heritage managers in Australia noted with concern the expression of a management philosophy which encouraged the devaluing and removal of European cultural heritage in national parks and protected areas. In the 1990s when the phenomenon became the subject of academic and professional analysis, it was attributed to a longstanding separation in Western notions of culture and nature which underpinned a conflict between the ascendant concept of wilderness and the artefacts of human use and association. As the century drew to a close, these expressions of concern began to fade in line with the emergence of new international valuations of the natural world which rejected wilderness in favour of the conservation of biodiversity. Rather than see cultural heritage as an impediment, this new model saw the values, traditions and diversity of human groups as vital assets in the conservation project. This thesis examines these two shifts in conservation practice and their wider implications for the management of cultural values.

Following an interpretation of Western cultural philosophy and its translation to Australia, a review of the literature established that the first shift was a product of an ecocentric value system adopted by national park managers from the 1970s. Ecocentrism reinforced and extended cultural assumptions implicit in the American 'Yellowstone' national park model influential in Australia and generated a new appreciation of the value of wilderness as a place where non-human species could evolve without human interference. In this way it served to broaden the existing separation of humans from nature. The implication of this shift for the management of cultural values in wild areas was profound. An in-depth case study of the establishment of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) in the late 1980s, a major part of the thesis, documented an active misanthropism which, it is argued, was based on the moral authority offered by ecocentrism. A 1992 management plan constructed the TWWHA as wilderness refuge with intrinsically valuable ecological communities and processes. Important cultural values of the TWWHA were not identified and those that were tended to be poorly managed and inadequately resourced.

The second shift, it is argued from the literature, had its origins in the 1970s and 1980s in a growing international awareness that the powerful Yellowstone model,

with its focus on spectacular natural features and unpopulated parks, was structurally limited in its ability to conserve biodiversity and slow to respond to the aspirations of indigenous people. These problems fuelled the development of alternate conservation models and prompted new research culminating in the 1990s rejection of wilderness in favour of bio-regional strategies. The new strategies accepted that humans have a positive role to play in conserving biodiversity and recognise that culture and nature are inextricably entwined. A number of contemporary conservation initiatives at national and international levels, including the details of a new 1999 management plan for the TWWHA, were used to provide evidence of this shift. Each embodied a rejection of wilderness for its own sake, revealed a consistent focus on the conservation of biodiversity and integrated the management of natural and cultural values to varying degrees.

These findings confirm the two shifts in conservation practice. The thesis makes contributions to the literature in a number of areas. These include enhancing understandings of the rationales that have underpinned Australian protected area management; in providing an analysis of the impact of ecocentrism of particular interest in relation to emerging trends in environmental history which seek to understand the social implications of conservation initiatives, and in placing the Tasmanian experience in protected area management in a wider context.

Acknowledgments

The production of this thesis has really only been possible through the forbearance and support of those close to me and the active assistance of a number of friends and colleagues.

Above all I thank my wife and family for allowing me to absent myself from all those family duties and responsibilities over the long period of time this thesis dominated all our lives. As anyone who has undertaken a PhD while working and raising young children knows, the challenges have been significant.

I also thank my supervisor Dr Jim Russell who provided support and encouragement for a project whose duration not only challenged administrative patience but frequently crossed disciplinary boundaries. I thank Jim for his insights, his patience and his willingness to embark with me on a journey to engage the complex meanings of the Upper Mersey Valley.

I also thank Dr Peter Hay without whose periodic assistance I would never have properly understood the intricacies of ecocentrism and the significance of the Tasmanian context. Thanks are also due to Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith who played an important role in alerting me to the existence of a 'national park' corporate culture and its American antecedents.

I was also fortunate to have mentors in Professor Michael Roe and Ken Felton. I wish to thank Michael for maintaining his interest in my development as an historian and in being willing to review text and offer assistance when required. I offer a special thanks to Ken for those stimulating monthly meetings over coffee where our free-ranging discussion over a range of issues, including many central to this thesis, provided me with a valuable opportunity to explore ideas and rehearse arguments.

I thank also staff from the Parks and Wildlife Service (in all its corporate incarnations) for responding to my many requests for information.

My final thanks are to those people of the Upper Mersey who all those years ago helped me to understand a different world and encouraged me to write about it.

Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Illustrations (maps, figures, tables)	viii
Introduction	viii

Chapters	page
1 The changing status of cultural values in natural areas	1
2 Ecology, national parks and misanthropic wilderness	15
Emerging visions of Australian nature	20
The scientific vision	21
The Romantic vision	21
The colonial vision	22
The national vision	22
The ecological vision	22
Modern Australian attitudes to nature and the influence of ecology	23
Ecology as a moral force	25
Anthropocentrism and Ecocentrism	28
Ecology and Wilderness	32
Australian national parks – an American legacy	36
National parks and ecology – a misanthropic union	45
Conclusion	46
3 Ecocentrism and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area	48
The creation of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area	49
The politics of wilderness	49
The Upper Mersey Valley and wilderness	56
The development of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan	66
The meanings of heritage	73
Contesting constructs of heritage	77
Ecocentrism under political assault	81
Conclusion	83

4 Draping the blanket of wilderness – Ecocentrism and Tasmanian cultural values	86
The Management of Cultural Values Under the 1997 TWWHA Management Plan	88
The traditional cultural values of the TWWHA	94
Case Study 1: Tasmanian skin sheds and snaring huts: Buildings of the fur trade	95
Towards a typology of skin sheds	98
Skin sheds	99
Snaring huts	99
The significance of skins sheds and snaring huts	102
Case Study 2: Assessing cultural values in natural areas: The Upper Mersey Valley Project	104
Historic values assessment	105
Social and aesthetic values assessments	107
Case Study 3: The Traditional Practices Project	110
Case Study 4: Burning back with the snow	114
Environmental and cultural outcomes of burning back with the snow	117
Cross-cultural and other comparisons	118
'Draping the blanket of wilderness' – The search for alternate meaning	121
Conclusion	128
5 'A new paradigm for protected areas in a new century'	132
The national park – a paradigm besieged	133
The social justice issue	134
The biodiversity issue	138
Further challenges	140
Ecocentrism – the emerging new paradigm	143
International trends in cultural heritage management under the new paradigm	150
The World Heritage Area Convention	150
Empowering indigenous Australians	155
The new paradigm in Australia – Emerging landscape models of conservation	157
Towards integrated models of culture and nature – The Regional Forest Agreement process and the Richmond Communique	160
The 1999 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan	165
Conclusion	171

6 Conclusion	173
The first shift reviewed	174
The second shift reviewed	176
Limitations of the data	177
Contributions to the literature	178
Concluding comment	183
Appendix: Criteria for the register of the national estate	186
References	188