

WILDTIMES

Issue 30
July 2007



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Newsletter of WILDCARE Inc

Tasmania's largest incorporated volunteer organisation, caring for wild places, wildlife and cultural heritage.

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2007 WILDCARE Tasmania Nature Writing

The winners of the 2007 WILDCARE Tasmania Nature Writing Prize were:

First prize of \$5000 and a writers residency in Tasmania's National Park (and a WILDCARE beanie and vest) was awarded to Dael Allison for her essay 'Polyp'. The judges commented that "This essay is a superbly written, intelligently considered account of the death of the coral massifs that fringe the Indonesian island of Nias, following an upheaval of the seabed at the time of the Tsunami. It is erudite, assured and 'outside the square' avoiding any formulaic approaches to the topic and genre". Daels story is published elsewhere in this WILDTIMES.

Dael spent her two week residency on Maria Island. Dael was based in Prero's Cottage, a basic but snug hideaway on Darlington Bay. But Dael also ranged far and wide over the island, including to the top of the imposing mountain Bishop and Clerk. It was an inspiring time, with the voices of Maria's past prompting some literary reflection. The scenery and wildlife were also a feature, with a local resident wombat family providing much amusement. Among other writing projects, Dael worked on a novel, which she is hoping to finish later this year. She spoke highly of all the island staff, who were both informative and helpful to her during a memorable stay. Dael led a Writers workshop at Seven Mile Beach (in the Parks and Wildlife Service Visitor Centre/Offices) as another component of the WILDCARE Tasmania Nature Writing Prize. The



Dael Allison

workshop was well attended and some really creative thinking and writing ensued.

Runner up \$250 - Karen Darby with 'Nature the Healer'. This essay is a beautifully wrought observation of the natural world from an earlier time, sensitive, insightful, deeply engaged with the rhythms of life within which the author moved. This work was submitted by Karen who is the daughter of the late author of the diaries, Ann Butler.

Special commendations were mentioned for Stephanie Green - 'Golden Mountain'- a multifaceted meditation upon Burnie's woodchip pile

Claire Aman - 'Sustenance' a dark and enigmatic essay, and

Sharon Moore - 'Water and the Mountain' a meditation on Hobart's first mountain waterworks.

Congratulations to all of the winners, and thank you to all authors who submitted works.

"So, does writing make a difference in the world? Maybe it doesn't directly put trees in the ground, or clean up litter or even maintain a remote lighthouse. But it has been shown on many occasions that literature and art can change people and their understanding and passion and then they go and change the world. Writing (and reading) can take us on a journey into the wild corners of our minds, and help us to understand that we act out our lives in the context of a natural world, and it beats in our hearts and lives in our minds, in the same way as we live in the world."

Andrew Smith, Co-Chair WILDCARE Inc 



Karen Darby

Minutes of the WILDCARE Inc Annual General Meeting

Held at Narawntapu National Park, Sunday 22 April 2007

Present:

Andrew Smith (Co-Chair Appointed and Meeting Chair), Marianne Watson (Acting Co-Chair Elected), Kath Collins, Ian Fitzallen, Joan Fitzallen, Bill Forsyth, Bruce Johns, Ian Johns, Jerry Kregar, Eva Brockman, Chris Leitch, Alastair Ross, Julia Butler Ross, Colin Rowe, Patricia Scott, Rosanna Watson, and Geoff Wilkins

Apologies:

Craig Saunders (Treasurer)

Welcome:

Andrew Smith welcomed members to the AGM.

Financial Statements:

The Treasurer's Report, prepared by Craig Saunders, was read aloud by Andrew Smith and accepted

The Audited financial statements were presented and accepted - moved by Jerry Kregar and seconded by Geoff Wilkins.

Co-Chair's Reports:

Andrew Smith read his report aloud and it was accepted.



As Marianne Watson had only recently been appointed, she did not present a report.

Votes of Thanks:

Julia Butler Ross thanked Andrew Smith for his work during the last 12 months as Co-Chair Appointed and Ian Fitzallen thanked Chris Leitch for his work with WILDCARE Inc.

Election of Office Bearers:

Andrew Smith declared vacant the positions of Treasurer and Co-Chair Elected (including the role of Public Officer).

Treasurer: Craig Saunders was nominated by Andrew Smith and seconded by Chris Leitch and elected unopposed.

Co-Chair Elected: Marianne Watson was nominated by Bill Forsyth, seconded by Andrew Smith and elected unopposed.

Appointment of Auditor:

Bill Forsyth moved and Ian Fitzallen seconded that Peter Lindsay be retained as Auditor for the coming year. Accepted by the meeting.

Other Business:

None.

Andrew Smith declared the AGM closed. 




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Interested in contributing to the protection and management of some of the world's most spectacular and important National Parks and Reserves?

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Almost 40% (2.5 million ha) of our island State, Tasmania, is reserved for conservation.

These places contain some of the world's most spectacular forests, beaches, heathlands, wild rivers, wetlands, mountains and wilderness.

For the incredible diversity of wildlife species living here, there can be no other place than Tasmania.

Tasmania is one of those special places, rare in the modern urbanised global environment.

The natural places are still spectacularly natural.

But the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service cannot manage such a large, complex and important reserve system on its own.

Involving community in the business of managing the reserves is intrinsic

to the way the Parks and Wildlife Service works.

WILDCARE Inc established Tasmania's WILDCARE Gift Fund in 2005 to provide an opportunity for those people who cherish the existence of Tasmania's natural places to support its protection and professional management through tax-deductible donations and bequests.

Tasmania's WILDCARE Gift Fund supports the Parks and Wildlife Service. By raising funds for real-life Reserve management and nature conservation projects, identified and prioritised in consultation between WILDCARE and the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Help us to make sure Tasmania's special natural corner of the world is protected and well-managed for all time.

Please, donate to Tasmania's WILDCARE Gift Fund. Spread the word to friends and work mates.

Donations to the fund work hard for the environment because we, as volunteers, work hard alongside the Parks and Wildlife Service, stretching the effectiveness of every dollar donated.



Support Reserve Management and nature conservation

Please make a donation to Tasmania's WILDCARE GIFT FUND

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Donate online www.wildcaretas.org.au or complete this form and send to WILDCARE Inc c/- GPO Box 1751 Hobart 7001

Working with the Parks and Wildlife Service to fund the protection, care and management of Tasmania's stunning conservation reserve network.

Thank You

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Phone number		
Email Address		
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to make a <i>once-only donation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Cheque/Money order attached <input type="checkbox"/> Credit card details below	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to make a <i>regular monthly donation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Credit Card details below	\$
<input type="checkbox"/> VISA <input type="checkbox"/> Mastercard <input type="checkbox"/> American Express <input type="checkbox"/> Bankcard		
Card number	_____	
Expiry Date	____/____	Name on Card _____
Signature of Cardholder	_____	

10th Anniversary National Conference

WILDCARE Inc (Tasmania) invites you to its 10th Anniversary National Conference "Volunteering for wild places, wildlife and cultural heritage"

- Are you...
- A volunteer?
- A volunteer program manager?
- From a volunteer organisation?
- From a community-based Foundation or Gift Fund?
- From an agency or other organisation that benefits from the assistance of volunteers?

Do you operate in any of the following areas?

- Reserve and public management,
- cultural heritage conservation,
- nature conservation (on private or public land),
- wildlife care and rehabilitation,
- wildlife emergency rescue (eg whales rescue and oiled seabird rescue),
- visitor services, or
- community environmental education.

Are you interested in ...

- Hearing about and sharing exciting ways of volunteering?
- Learning new ways to build relationships to support volunteering?

- Identifying issues and exploring solutions relating to volunteering?
- Sharing your successes and how you conquered challenges?
- Sharing experience and knowledge about innovative and effective ways of encouraging, managing and supporting volunteers in the natural and cultural environment?
- Meeting with other interesting volunteers and volunteer program managers from around Australia?

This conference presents an opportunity for volunteers, volunteer and other community organisations, volunteer program managers and staff from partner agencies to get together and take time to build better ways to work together towards a healthy reserve system, a protected, cared for and rehabilitated environment and wildlife (on and off reserve), protected and cared for cultural heritage and sites and an educated and aware community. And check out the great field trips for day two!

About WILDCARE Inc www.wildcaretas.org.au

About the Conference www.leishman-associates.com.au/wildcare2007

WILDCARE Inc Conference Organising Team 

WILDTIMES publication schedule

Issue #	Article Submissions Due	Publication Date
31	31 Aug 2007	Sep 2007
32	31 Dec 2007	Jan 2008
33	31 Mar 2008	Apr 2008

Publication dates are subject to receiving a sufficient number of articles to allow publishing to go ahead.

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WILDCARE Inc. 10th Anniversary National Conference

STANLEY BURBURY THEATRE
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA, HOBART
23-25 NOVEMBER 2007



Volunteering for wild places, wildlife and cultural heritage

INVITATION FROM THE CONVENOR

WILDCARE Inc (Tasmania) invites you to the 10th Anniversary National Conference *'Volunteering for wild places, wildlife and cultural heritage.'*

This conference presents an opportunity for volunteers, volunteer and other community organisations, volunteer program managers and staff from partner agencies to get together and take time to build better ways to work together towards a healthy reserve system, a protected, cared for and rehabilitated environment and wildlife, protected and cared for cultural heritage and sites and an educated and aware community.

WILDCARE Inc is a broad community, not-for-profit, volunteer organisation whose members provide time, effort, intellect and funding to a myriad of projects and programs in reserve management, visitor services, community education, for nature conservation (on both public and private conservation land), rehabilitating and rescuing wildlife and supporting cultural heritage conservation, in partnership with state and local government and private landholders.

Our membership numbers have at times been in excess of 4000 (that is 1 in every 100 people in Tasmania). The number of hours our members provide each year is in the many hundreds of thousands, with a value of many millions of dollars. We have 42 Friends of style groups (Community Action in Reserves groups) within our organisation, supporting reserves and caring for wildlife. We are a registered Environmental Organisation with a tax-deductible Gift Fund, and an approved charity under the Tasmanian State Service Workplace Giving Scheme.

We are keen promoters of cooperative partnerships with reserve managers, private land holders, wildlife managers and cultural heritage managers, with the aim of making a real difference in the real world. We like sharing ideas, developing new approaches and lending a practical hand to others. How about you?

We would love to see you in Hobart and our spectacular island home, to share and discover the possibilities and benefits of volunteering in the natural and cultural worlds.

PLATINUM SPONSOR



WILDCARE Inc Conference Organising Team

listen, see, share...



WILDCARE Inc.
10th Anniversary National Conference
 STANLEY BURBURY THEATRE, UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA, HOBART
 23-25 NOVEMBER 2007

Please complete and return with payment to:
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 Email: stacey@leighton-associates.com.au
TAX INVOICE: ABN 22 103 078 897

REGISTRATION FORM

Section A - Delegate Details

Title (please circle): Mr / Mrs / Mrs / Mr / Dr

Name: _____ Surname: _____

Organisation: _____

Position Held/Title: _____

Postal Address: _____

Suburb: _____

State: _____ Post Code: _____ Country: (if not Australia) _____

Business Telephone: _____ Home Phone: _____

Facsimile: _____ Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Special Requirements (dietary/access): _____

PRIVACY NOTICE

Attendee names will be added to a list of name and organisation details for distribution to sponsors, exhibitors, and delegates.
 If you do not want your name to appear on this list please indicate below.

I do not wish to have my name and contact details on the delegate list

Section B - Registration (please indicate which cost/type of registration applies)

EARLY BIRD: 1 JUNE - 15 SEPTEMBER 2007

STANDARD: AFTER 15 SEPTEMBER 2007

FULL REGISTRATION - includes Welcome Reception and 10th Anniversary BBQ. Conference Dinner ticket may be purchased separately below.

- | | | | |
|---|-------|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Bird Volunteer: | \$350 | <input type="checkbox"/> Standard Volunteer: | \$400 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Bird Government/Corporate: | \$450 | <input type="checkbox"/> Standard Government/Corporate: | \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concession (Student): | \$275 | | |

DAY REGISTRATION - does not include Welcome Reception or Dinner

Please indicate which day you are attending: Friday 23 November or Saturday 24 November

Day Registration: \$175

ADDITIONAL TICKETS - for day delegates or accompanying persons/partners

- Welcome Function - included in any Full Registration (includes drinks and finger food)
- 10th Birthday BBQ - included in any Full Registration (includes drinks and finger food) - Additional Tickets \$35 per person
- Conference Dinner - (Optional Function) Please select one restaurant: (details included in program, beverages are not included in the cost)

<input type="checkbox"/> Annapurna Indian Cuisine	\$24 per person	<input type="checkbox"/> Sals on the Square	\$30 per person
<input type="checkbox"/> Ball & Chain Grill	\$31 per person	<input type="checkbox"/> Mummaluka African Cuisine	\$34 per person
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue Skies Restaurant	\$40 per person		

TOTAL SECTION B \$ _____

Includes the purchase of _____ ADDITIONAL conference dinner tickets

Accompanying Person Name: _____

Special Requirements (dietary/access): _____

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Section C – Accommodation

A minimum deposit, equivalent to one night's accommodation, is required to secure your booking. Delegates may choose to pay the full amount for accommodation.

Name of Hotel _____ Rate _____
 Arrival Day and Date _____ Departure Day & Date _____
 Additional Persons _____

TOTAL SECTION C \$ _____ (minimum of 1 night's deposit)

Section D – Tours & Field Trips

The tours will be held on Saturday 24th November, and will be a full day activity, some leaving early in the morning. All delegates will return to Hobart in time to attend one of the conference dinners. Please note, the tours are subject to change; and are based on minimum numbers.

- Yes, I would like to participate in the field trip(s): (see list below)
- Maatsuyker Island – \$230 Mt Field National Park – no cost Melaleuca – \$275 (inc round trip flight) Maria Island – \$65
 Lake St Clair – \$65 Mt Wellington – no cost Tasman Island – \$250 (inc helicopter flight)

TOTAL SECTION D \$ _____

Section E – Payment

All fees are quoted in Australian dollars. Cheques, Money Orders or Bank Drafts should be made payable to "Leishman Associates – Wildcare" and drawn on an Australian Bank or Australian branch of a foreign bank for the total amount in Australian dollars.

METHOD OF PAYMENT Credit Card Cheque Money Order Bank Draft

SECTION B – REGISTRATION **TOTAL FEE \$ AUD _____**

SECTION C – ACCOMMODATION **TOTAL FEE \$ AUD _____**

SECTION D – OPTIONAL TOURS **TOTAL FEE \$ AUD _____**

TOTAL FEES PAYABLE B + C + D = \$ AUD _____

CREDIT CARD PAYMENT Mastercard Visa

Card Number _____ Expiry Date _____

Cardholder Name: _____

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Accommodation

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**Apartments: \$100 per night
Single Rooms: \$50 per night**

Double rooms will also be available. Please contact Leishman Associates for pricing information.

GROSVENOR COURT APARTMENTS

42 Grosvenor Street, Sandy Bay – 1km from the conference venue
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**Studio: \$122 per night
Two Bedroom Apartments:
\$189 per night**

MAYFAIR PLAZA

236 Sandy Bay Road, Sandy Bay – 1.4 km from the conference venue
 Mayfair Plaza Motel provides unique accommodation set in a quiet oasis. Spend time browsing along the Sandy Bay Road shops and afterwards enjoy a light snack or coffee at one of the many cafes or restaurants in the area. Mini bar, breakfast available, off street parking, all non smoking rooms, Astar, laundry.

**Single/Double/Twin:
\$119 per night**

MOTEL 429

429 Sandy Bay Road – 1.4 km from the conference venue
 Motel 429 comprises 33 rooms which are all non-smoking. Located opposite West Point, all rooms have individual heating/cooling systems which are guest controlled. All rooms have been recently redecorated and have their own balconies. Mini bar, television, in-house movies, iron and ironing board.
**Standard Twin: \$120 per night
Standard Double (1 x Queen):
\$115 per night**

What's happening around the Parks?

Feasibility study gives Tasman walk the thumbs-up

The development of a world-class bushwalk on the Tasman Peninsula has moved a step closer, with a feasibility study strongly endorsing the project.

Launching the 'Three Capes Track' study, Premier Paul Lennon said the next move would be to amend the Tasman National Park Management Plan which would provide the community with further opportunity for involvement in the proposal. The PWS feasibility study confirmed the project had great potential and would ultimately lead to:

- 35 direct jobs in the Tasman region;
- \$18.6 million in additional visitor spending;
- 10,000 walkers a year using the track; and

- 50,000 extra bed nights on the peninsula.

Tourism Minister Paula Wriedt said the development of the track, taking in Capes Hauy, Pillar and Raoul and including some legs by sea, was an opportunity for Tasmania to be a world leader in iconic walks. 'We know that 230,000 tourists visited the Tasman Peninsula last year and there is great potential for growth in the region. Also, around 50% of people who visited Tasmania last year (410,000 people) took part in some form of bushwalk or visited a National Park, reserve or conservation area. So the 'Three Capes Track' would be a spectacular way of meeting visitor demand for this type of experience'. PWS Southern Region office moves to Glenorchy

The Southern Region of the PWS has moved from Lampton Avenue to larger premises at 124A Tolosa Street, Glenorchy, that provide an extra 200m² more floor area. Hazell Bros initiated the office swap to consolidate its existing base in Lampton Avenue and PWS Southern Region is pleased with the outcome. The new PWS premises include a lockable compound and a big workshop with a mezzanine floor.

The full complement of 17 staff includes the Derwent Field Centre, the Macquarie Island Field Centre, two planners, two fire management officers and other Southern Region staff. Phone numbers remain unchanged by the move.

Maori chiefs return to Maria Island

Another chapter in Maria Island's fascinating history has been unveiled through an exhibition of portraits of three Maori chiefs who reluctantly called the island home in the 19th century.

In November 1846 five Maori chiefs were transported from New Zealand to Maria for their part in an uprising in the Panaha Mountains near Wellington. After a brief time in Hobart Town, the men were imprisoned on Maria Island under the care of Dr John Jennings Imrie who spoke their native language.

While four of the chiefs were eventually repatriated, one – Te Umoroa Hohepa

– died at the age of 24 of tuberculosis while on the island in July 1847. The remains of Hohepa were exhumed and returned to New Zealand in 1988. During their exile the five chiefs were painted by John Skinner-Prout; these portraits now hang in the British Museum. Prints of three of the paintings have been secured with the help of interpretation and education officer Jenni Burdon and are now on display in the Maria Island Coffee Palace.

Working bee celebrates memories of Schouten Island

Ninety-one year old Ted Cook shared his memories and adventures of early days on Schouten Island during a recent working bee on the island. PWS ranger Pete Lingard has coordinated working bees on Schouten Island, in the south of Freycinet National Park, for the past nine years. He said the most recent, during April, was particularly memorable.

'A terrific team of WILDCARE Inc volunteers has been involved in the project from the start and several have missed only one or two of those working bees in the nine years', Pete said. The volunteers' efforts have focused on weed work and preserving the historic huts on the island.

Pete said that the gorse problem on Schouten Island was daunting at the start. 'When we first came to the island, there were patches of gorse 100 metres by 50 metres and three metres high. It is very encouraging that the gorse has not come back from many of the places from which it was removed'. It does however require ongoing action to suppress re-growth while the native vegetation gains a foothold.

Pete said that with the progress achieved in gorse control, the team has turned its attention to restoration of the island's historic huts. The group obtained a Tasmanian Community Fund grant of \$15,000 to undertake maintenance and restoration works on the heritage huts at Moreys Bay and Cooks Hut at Cooks Beach on the Freycinet Peninsula. Last month the team tackled much-needed restoration work

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including painting, new roofing and replacing a chimney, to the front (younger) hut on Schouten Island. The older hut was stabilised and re-clad in 2004, saving it from near collapse and ensuring its future.

For this year's major working bee, Pete invited 14 people with close connections to the area back to Schouten Island. One of those was 91 year old Ted Cook, who was born at Cooks Beach. Ted's father, Bart Cook, held the grazing lease at Cooks Beach until the 1930s while his uncle, Athol Cook, held the lease on Schouten Island until the late 1940s.

Ted recalled a time when he and his brother paddled, as they often did, over to Schouten Island and were swept out through Schouten Passage by strong westerlies and the tide.

'We went outside twice in a dinghy', Ted said, 'we tried rowing across to Schouten but were swept out to sea by a westerly with the tide running. One time we had to row all night so that we didn't get washed into the broken water of Slaughterhouse Bay by an onshore swell.

After it was light, we saw where the passage was and rowed back through it'.

Fewer steps on the way to Wineglass Bay

The project to upgrade the experience for visitors to Freycinet's iconic Wineglass Bay recommenced this autumn and it's hoped that the one-way loop component will be open for use by the end of June.

Project coordinator, ranger Stuart Dudgeon, said the current focus is on linking the completed sections so the loop component can be used by visitors. 'The big change walkers will experience is the dramatic reduction in the number of steps', Stuart said, 'before we began this project, visitors had to struggle up quite a steep track with more than 600 steps to get to the saddle before reaching the Wineglass Bay lookout. The new route of the track on the ascent to the saddle was chosen to minimise the number of steps and that's what we've done: the new loop has less than 200 steps and they are more regular and not as high. As well, the track is wider and has a better surface for walking'.

The upgrade has been a major project

spanning 15 months to date, with approximately 400 metres of the existing track on the new loop yet to be upgraded.

'The replacement of the lookout platform; the upgrading of the remaining 400 metres of original track; and the track-head area, are the next priorities to complete the new experience', Stuart said.

He also remarked that sourcing rock for the project had been a challenge, 'However we have sought and recently gained the relevant approvals to collect surface rock from a public reserve between the town and the town water supply header tank.

The works associated with the rock collection have been modified to address issues raised through the environmental assessment process'.

National Volunteer Week Celebrated at Tamar Island Wetlands

On Thursday 17 May the PWS hosted a special certificate celebration for all the volunteers at Tamar Island. Their dedication and contribution to wetlands conservation was recognised through the presentation of individual certificates and engraved pens.

Peter Mooney, General Manager of the PWS, presented the certificates and spoke of the significant contribution the volunteer team makes. 'The Tamar Island Wetland Centre volunteer program is one of the longest running PWS-community programs and it is an excellent example of community partnerships in action', Peter said.

Thanks to the commitment of the volunteers, the PWS is able to keep the Centre open 364 days a year. Over 5,000 hours of volunteer time go into keeping the Centre functioning with many volunteers committing to one day per week, a fantastic contribution.

Tamar Island not only has volunteer guides (VROs) but also volunteers who help with interpretation and field work.

Earlier this year a volunteer saw the fruits of his labours realised when the Centre launched its new 'Self-guided Walk' to the Island. Peter Mooney made special mention of this effort and was delighted with the result.

'Through volunteer efforts, sponsorship from the printer and PWS staff support, a significantly high quality interpretation tool for ages 7-90 has been produced, a fantastic outcome', he declared.

Chris Colley, Regional Manger, and Stan Matuszek, Regional Operations Manager, were among other invited guests joining the volunteers in celebrating their work with the PWS.

After the formal proceedings were over everyone enjoyed lunch on the deck overlooking our unique wetlands.

If you are interested in joining this excellent team please contact Janice Miller, Business Enterprise Manager, Tamar Island Wetlands Centre on 6336 5319. 🐾

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Overland Hut Wardens debrief and celebration - Freycinet



Volunteer Overland Track Wardens have completed another eventful season (06/07) and held their annual debrief/celebration at the end of April, this year being held at Coles Bay.

Unfortunately there were some absentees due to overseas travel and one of the volunteers living in Queensland (how shocking!), but the rest of us soldiered on and had a debriefing session followed by an enjoyable celebration dinner at the Iluka Tavern.

Yes this iconic volunteer program attracts people from interstate to volunteer to assist the Parks and Wildlife Service and fellow bushwalkers.

Every year we receive enquiries nationally and internationally about volunteer programs and opportunities and this program attracts the most by far, due mainly to the location of the program within the iconic Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Many stories and experiences were swapped regarding the variety of visitors/walkers who walked the track, dressed in all manner of gear and associated accessories including the cling wrap plastic look and matching umbrellas.

The volunteer season starts on 1 December of any year and continues to after Easter of the following year, to cover the busy walking season, when their advice, assistance and experience is most needed.

Volunteers can participate as an individual or preferably as a couple/two, as there are only 2 bunks in the quarters.

The length of stay is negotiable, however 7-14 day stints is preferred and food (dried packet etc.) parcels can usually be arranged to be chopped

in at the beginning of the season, so you only have to walk in with your personal belongings and fresh food.


There are some prerequisites for this volunteer opportunity which include having walked the Overland Track, having the appropriate First Aid



qualifications and other such sensible things.

The program offers on-site training by our resident voluntary OTW program coordinator Bill Forsyth, who has been a volunteer with the program since its inception 9 years ago and has spent nearly a year of his life on the Overland Track, volunteering and walking.

If you have the time, experience and want to participate in this great program please contact Andrew Smith (Andrew.Smith@parks.tas.gov.au or (03) 6233 2867) for an information pack.

Chris Leitch
State Volunteer Engagement Facilitator
DPIW
(OTW program facilitator 1998 – 2007) 





Parks Shop

24 Main Road Huonville

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- Range of pre-visit information relating to Tasmania's National Parks & Reserves
- Parks Passes
- Maps
- Books – Adult and Children's Range
- Australian Animal Puppets
- Jigsaws – 24 to 2000 piece, including Southwest National Park
- Souvenirs
- Clothing – fleecy jackets, vests, ponchos, raincoats, t shirts
- Posters
- And more

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Friends of Maatsuyker Island News

(article originally published in PRISM newsletter, April 2007).

The Friends of Maatsuyker Island (FOMI), a volunteer group whose concern is conservation and protection of the island's natural and cultural heritage, has been busy in recent months, both on and off the island.

FOMI is working in consultation with the PWS and the Biodiversity Conservation Branch to develop visitor guidelines for Maatsuyker Island.

The guidelines are essential to ensure safe visitor access and to ensure proper quarantine procedures are carried out to prevent the introduction of pests and weeds.

Maatsuyker Island has no introduced animals, and relatively few introduced weeds, despite over 100 years of European occupation.

FOMI organised two visits to the island, in February and April.

The full-day trips, aboard Southern Ocean Adventures' Velocity, provided an excellent opportunity for visitors to see both the island and Tasmania's spectacular and remote and rugged south-west coastline.

On one trip, visitors were fortunate enough to be able to spend several hours ashore and tour the historic lighthouse.

The Maatsuyker Island lighthouse is only one of two in Australia to have its original mechanism in situ and in working order.

The visit fulfilled the life-long dream for the great grand-daughter of the Marine Board Architect, Robert Huckson, who designed the 17m tower and three residences, to step ashore. The buildings were constructed in the period 1889–1890.

March also saw the first of three 'artist in residence' programs commence on Maatsuyker Island. Supported by Arts Tasmania and the PWS, the residencies range from four to eight weeks and allow for an individual (or collaboration of practising artists) to work in any art form to develop their work in response to the natural environment of Tasmania.

Sue Lovegrove is the current artist in residence and will be followed by Margie Jenkins and Matt Newton later this year.

An environmental weed program has also taken place for the fourth year in a row on Maatsuyker Island.

This year, a team of four weeders (Craig Saunders from PWS and FOMI volunteers Graham Brinckman, Steve Cronin and Jean Jackson) spent a week on the island in March.

The program builds on previous years' highly successful efforts aimed at controlling (and eventually eradicating) blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) and *Montbretia* (*Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora*) from the island.

The project was funded initially through the Australian Government's Envirofund, but this year's trip was funded jointly by PWS, FOMI and the Huon Valley Council.

This partnership between all levels of government and the community points to the high value placed on this remote corner of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Annual follow up on these weeds will need to continue for many years before we can truly claim their 'eradication' from Maatsuyker Island.

FOMI is hoping to work closely with the island's volunteer caretakers to ensure this essential work continues.

You can become a Friend of Maatsuyker Island by joining WILDCARE Inc. and registering Maatsuyker Island as your area of interest. Visit www.wildcaretas.org.au for a membership form.

For information on FOMI activities and events, including future working bees, day trips and fund-raising activities to support the island's conservation programs, please contact the Secretary Fiona.Taylor@utas.edu.au.

Fiona Taylor (FOMI) and Craig Saunders (Regional Volunteer Facilitator, PWS).



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WANTED: Energetic SPRATS!

How long would it take you to walk the mostly-trackless coast from the mouth of Macquarie Harbour, to Cockle Creek? If you are fit, accustomed to carrying a heavy pack over rugged ground, had the assistance of a boat here and there and a helicopter to drop food supplies, it might take 38 days.



The southwest coast near the Lewis River

That's exactly what bushwalker Jon Marsden-Smedley, along with a few selected companions, did last summer. The purpose of his epic (which followed other epics in previous years) was to survey outbreaks of the invasive coastal weed sea spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*).

Sea spurge has become well established on the coastlines of southern Australia, including parts of Tasmania. It devastates landforms and ecosystems. Natural geomorphological processes are affected, native plant communities are displaced, and the habitats of animals and shore-breeding birds are transformed. Spread by the ocean it establishes itself mainly at the back of sandy beaches, cobble-coves and even in rock crevices, spreading outwards from these areas. It can be treated simply by uprooting or, if the taproot is too deep, by cutting and painting with herbicide. Where conditions permit herbicide may be sprayed on the plants.

The weed is now threatening the south and west coast of Tasmania within the World Heritage Southwest National Park and Southwest Conservation Area. The extent of invasion has so far been limited, but that will change if concerted action is not taken and maintained to remove existing plants and control future outbreaks. [For further information see the 'Tasmanian Beach Weed Strategy' (Rudman, DPIWE, 2003), accessible on the DPIW website.]

On his journey Jon pulled out a few sea spurge plants, but did not have the time or capacity to attack the larger outbreaks, nor could he search every nook and cranny of the coast. Following his reports, in February/ March 2007 Senior Ranger Chris Arthur of the PWS organised a pilot project. Eight volunteers were helicoptered into a section of the coast in the Southwest Conservation Area and, over ten days, surveyed the shore in detail and treated all the sea spurge encountered. Included were two Tasmanian bushwalkers and a group of bushwalkers from the NSW volunteer organisation known as Friends of Colo, which specialises in dealing with willows and other weeds in remote parts of the Wollemi National Park.

The volunteers were landed at Sassy Creek and, after spending two days treating a significant outbreak there, they split into two parties; one travelling south and the other north. By the time the volunteers were lifted out, 50 kilometres of coastline had been visited, fifty-six sea spurge sites encountered and 100,000-plus plants killed by uprooting or herbicide.

There is much more to be done. Even the section of coast just treated will require many return visits before this aggressive weed is properly controlled. And unfortunately, although the PWS strongly supports the project and has allocated some funding, the necessary work is beyond its budget and organisational resources.

Enter the Spurge Remote Area Teams – SPRATS – the WILDCARE group kick-started by the volunteers in the pilot project. The group has applied for an Envirofund grant and is exploring other funding avenues. If the project proceeds as hoped, it is intended that in each of the next two summers eight teams of four bushwalkers will be helicoptered-in to walk different sections of the coast, searching for and treating the sea spurge. Four teams will start immediately after Christmas and will stay in the field for nearly two weeks, before being replaced by the second four teams.

Beyond the next two years there will be a need for ongoing patrols of the coast, though the amount of weeding required should be greatly reduced.

While parts of the coast offer easy walking along beaches and cobbles, the majority entails rocky coastline. Rock scrambling is required to various degrees, and in some places rivers have to be swum or thick scrub negotiated.

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To minimise risks to individuals and to the program, every participant in the fieldwork has to be a fit and experienced wilderness bushwalker, accustomed to carrying a heavy pack over rough ground. Each participant will be responsible for his or her own walking and camping equipment, rations and cooking, though people will be encouraged to pair-up where possible.

Weeding experience would be advantageous but not essential as the necessary training will be provided. First Aid qualifications and remote-area navigation skills are desirable, and of course, the ability to maintain a sense of humour while dealing with scrub, rock scrambles and adverse weather is essential!

If all this is a bit off-putting, think of the compensations: the opportunity to spend time with like-minded people on the wonderful wilderness coast; or perhaps visit the likes of Low Rocky Point, which everybody knows from the weather forecast, but few get to visit!


For the less adventurous or able, there are support roles involving volunteer driving, logistics support, data

management and public relations. SPRATS is looking for enthusiastic people to make a sustained contribution to the group.

To register as a SPRAT you first need to be a member of WILDCARE Inc. If you are not yet a member you can join at <www.wildcaretas.org.au> and tick SPRATS on your membership form. If you are already a member, you can select SPRATS by going to your personal details in the members-only area of the website, or contact <office@wildcaretas.org.au> to change your details.

SPRATS plans to hold a meeting in Hobart on 19 August, to appoint more office-bearers and start planning for next summer. After that, people who have registered will be invited to submit their details so the makeup of the field parties can be worked out. If in the meantime you feel you have particular skills or enthusiasm to offer the group, please contact the president Andy Macqueen on <andymacqueen@gmail.com>.

And to see more photos, go to the website, select groups and then WILDCARE SPRATS. 

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Annual Conference and Strategic Planning

Members who attended the Annual Conference participated in a workshop to identify a practical Vision for WILDCARE Inc for the next 10 years. The fact that there were no shocks about where we should be heading is good confirmation that we have a clear purpose and we need to continue to build on our strong foundations.

OUR VISION:

- Volunteers are valued, trained and supported.
- Everyone knows about WILDCARE Inc.
- Partnerships are formed with like minded organisations.
- On-ground work is planned, strategic and ongoing.

This Vision was then built on during a half day Strategic Planning workshop held at the Philip Smith Centre. The

following table documents the outcomes of that workshop, showing what WILDCARE does and how it does it.

As a result of this planning process, and continuing discussions at Board of Management level about future directions there are a number of changes about to be put into place in regard to the WILDCARE GIFT FUND Committee.

There is also a Special General Meeting proposed for 1 September 2007 to propose changes to the Constitution in relation the make-up and structure of the Board of Management. Notification of the special general meeting will be mailed directly to members. We hope that this and other opportunities identified through the strategic planning process will see WILDCARE Inc continue to strengthen and grow for many years to come.

Inputs	Activities*	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
In-kind services Office volunteers Board of Management Funding (external project based) Income (membership, donations and sponsorship) Equipment & Materials Skills & knowledge Database Web page and newsletter Procedures and guidelines Insurance	Support Structures for Groups/Branches Running the organisation Long Term Program Support and Participation Support and Participate in Emergency Response Programs Provide PWS/BCB/FT with Volunteer Assistance (Volunteer Referral) Promote Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation Keep Volunteer Records	Groups/Branches have increased capacity (resources, funding, ease of Operation) Smooth delivery of services and activities Long term opportunities for sustained involvement and support Immediate reaction – rapid response Community involvement in on ground projects Increased awareness of natural and cultural heritage conservation Access to organised information	A framework for community action in conservation Increased capacity because of greater resources Supportive relationships between volunteers and agencies Increased level of volunteerism for the natural and cultural environment High quality experiences for volunteers High quality natural and cultural conservation outcomes	Resources and capacity through partnership to make a positive difference in the Tasmanian environment Best management of natural and cultural assets by providing a framework for community involvement <i>Working together to make a difference in the environment</i> <i>Promoting conservation through community participation</i> <i>Working Together for the Environment</i>

*Activity headings	Activity examples
Support Structures for Groups/Branches	Funding/Grant applications, provide admin umbrella for groups/branches, support applications, program coordination, raise funds, manage money, advise on volunteer activities, program/project information, manage Group/Branch finances, Assist groups with funding applications, form groups, support friends groups, support wildlife carers
Running the Organisation	Management of organisation, financial administration, Board meetings, provide office support to membership, maintain database of members to support other activities, office membership, run meetings
Long Term Program Support and Participation	Hut restoration, do on-ground work/projects/programs, promote practical conservation actions, caretaker programs, Adopt-A-Track, track maintenance, special on-going programs eg; Orange Bellied Parrot, Caretakers, participate in programs – OBP's, OTW's
Support and Participate in Emergency Response Programs	Wildlife rescue, wildlife care, whale rescue
Provide PWS/BCB/HT/FT with Volunteer Assistance (Volunteer Referral)	Provide volunteers for short term projects – PWS, Biodiversity Conservation Branch, Heritage Tasmania & Forestry Tas, Volunteer call up and referral, working bees, assist PWS to source volunteer support, provide volunteer opportunities for individuals, Fund PWS (Small) projects involving volunteers, promote partnerships
Promote Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation	Offer Prize for Writing Competition, provide information (Web/Newsletter), publish a Newsletter, have a Website
Keep Volunteer Records	Volunteer database, Keep membership records including preferences/skills, keep records of projects, activities, hours etc

Are you one of those great people who have made a donation to WILDCARE Inc?

If you are one of the many donors to WILDCARE Inc, we are keen to hear what motivated you to do so.

We are using various survey techniques to try to find out what might be preventing or deterring people from donating to WILDCARE Inc to support reserve management and nature conservation.

We hope we can then design an effective marketing program and other processes to make donating more attractive.

One of the key things is getting the message right, and it seems logical to ask people like you who have already donated, what your motivation was and what you see to be the benefits derived from making a donation.

How did you make your donation?

- On the WILDCARE Inc web site.
- Using a WILDCARE Inc 'Giving' pamphlet.
- 'Topping-up' your membership payment using the donation space in the WILDCARE Inc Membership Form.

What sort of donation was it?

- A once-only donation.
- A regular credit card donation.
- A regular salary deduction donation.

Why did you choose WILDCARE Inc to donate to?

Please indicate which (if any) of the following influenced you.

- It was easy to make a donation.
- My donation will make a difference.
- My donation will be used wisely.
- WILDCARE Inc is a productive organisation.
- Reserve management is a worthy cause to support.
- Nature Conservation is a worthy cause to support.
- Managing National Parks is everyone's responsibility.
- I am giving something back to the environment I love.
- I cannot volunteer so this is my way of contributing.
- I like what WILDCARE Inc stands for.
- Other (explain) _____

Please forward completed form to the WILDCARE Inc Office c/- GPO Box 1751 Hobart 7001

Thank you for your assistance... and your donation! 

Winner WILDCARE Tasmania International Nature Writing Prize 2007

Polyp by Dael Allison

I stand in a graveyard. One of the saddest I've seen. Its silence and stillness represent the end of immeasurable life. Beyond the shoreline the clear sea deepens to pale green, then turquoise, before it reaches the uplifted corals of the outer reef, a thin line drawn parallel to the coast. Waves break lazily over the reef in a dull, distant drone.

The yellow sand of the inner reef is fine and dry. I dig my toes into stored sun. Coral stacks surround me, rising from their anchor point beneath the sand. Some are contained and rounded like small boulders, others spread metres across in a Gaudi fantasy of shapes. A few broad dome-topped columns, the accretion of centuries, rise higher than my head. Small waves lap tentatively a few metres away, but their location is wrong. They should be surging above these coral heads to shush on to the sand at the feet of the coconut palms two hundred metres inland. Instead this wide band of hot sand is studded with mounds and pillars of dead coral. A grey catacomb, in both directions as far as the eye can see along this Indonesian island coast. A mockery of the brilliant colour and teeming, vigorous underwater ecosystem that should be here.

This is a garden petrified. It conjures memories of walking through Australian bushland ravaged by fire, reduced to black sticks and bare earth. But the bush has proven time and time again it can survive desolation. Red shoots bleed from the blackened limbs of eucalypts and brilliant green spears erupt from apparently lifeless xanthorrhoea stumps; slowly life fights back. There is little likelihood of a life-affirming bloom occurring in this bleached coral landscape.

The death of these corals isn't an outcome of global warming. I know the precise moment when they began to die. Three months and two days after this same coastline experienced the horror of the Indian Ocean tsunami. Shortly before eleven-thirty on the night of March twenty-eighth 2005. When Nias, lying west of northern Sumatra, was hit by an eight-point-seven magnitude earthquake, and the

island buckled.

In those moments parts of the island and its beautiful coral reefs lifted by up to three metres. The nurturing sea drained from the inner reefs in a bathymetric apocalypse. Fish and crustaceans, sea-stars and sea-slugs, soft and hard-shelled molluscs, sting rays and squid were left gasping in air. The limpid reef habitat that tempered the seas and shielded the land from storm depredation was left unprotected. Gone the subaquatic radiance of coral light. Gone the fertile spawning grounds. On these coral heads, millions of polyps waited for the harsh inevitability of the sun.

Polyp. A word you can take out to play with its best friends, Syrup and Dollop. An alliterative word. A pulsing sweet and bursting word which takes hold of the lips and purses them, curls the tongue like a trigger, condenses air into ready expulsion, closing on the soft plosive like a kiss. Polyp. Pass it from mouth to mouth. The muscular expulsion of tiny blobs of animal life. Pop. The onomatopoeia of juicy gametes, soft globes of egg and sperm, ejecting from the mother coral into the amniotic sea.

Corals do not yield to the gravitational imperative of the full moon. They wait until the sea gentles, wanting the neap tide, the time when the pull of the moon works against the pull of the sun, the time of least tidal sway. They want the balm of warm currents, and a sexy blanket of darkness. For corals the sea of generation and continuity is a calm sea, a mothering sea. Only when the odds for survival are best do the polyps surrender their gametes in a synchronous swoon. Miniscule balloons of potential life, translucent and succulent. Wavering upwards through violet light in clouds as mysterious as nebulae.

Broadcast spawning is the coral equivalent of lurve. Girl gamete and boy gamete seek attachment, meet, and fuse to form a tiny planula or larva. This buoyant baby coral drifts, questing for a surface to anchor to. If successful the planula grows into a polyp. Polyps of hard coral secrete theca to form limestone cups called



corallites. In these safe, miniature caves the polyps develop into small organisms like anemones. The soft, colourful tentacles with which they catch their prey flower at each opening.

The two coral types are distinguished by the number of tentacles. Soft corals, octocorallia, have eight, while scleractinians, the hard corals, bear tentacles in multiples of six. The hard, or stony, corals and their broadcast-spawning planulae are the main reef-builder (hermatypic) corals, and the most common. Most of the soft corals are brooders; instead of broadcasting they retain their egg cells, releasing only the sperm gametes.

Once fertilized the planula drifts or crawls from the mother polyp's opening, looking for the anchor-point needed to start another colony. An established planula grows into a polyp, then divides in two and secretes a new corallite cup. This process, called asexual budding, is how colonies form. The calcium skeleton grows upwards and outwards, creating structures unique to each polyp type, including delicate finger, fan and lettuce corals, star corals and staghorns and the eerily familiar brain corals. The massy boulder corals, or coral heads, increase annually by one or two centimetres, more under favourable conditions, and become more stable as they grow. Branching corals, like elkhorns, which grow around ten centimetres a year, are more vulnerable to strong wave or anchor damage.

Coral spawning, the essence of potential and chance. Planulae float freely, but freedom is replete with danger. The planula is a perfect fast food package, likely to be swilled down the gullet of any hungry feeder from a tiny jellyfish to a twelve metre whale shark. Or there is the reproductive



joke of missing the target, cast adrift, life potential unrealised. A coral slick of decaying gametes and unattached planulae can be so dense on the ocean's surface it blocks the sun, inhibiting photosynthesis and causing the death of creatures in the waters below, including parent corals.

Drifting spawn wastes form a crimson-brown stain on the indifferent sea. This is the menstrual blood of an Asian princess, seized by a dragon and taken to live in its subaquatic lair. Or it is the solidified menses of snake-haired Medusa, one of the Gorgons, monstrous women of Ancient Greece who could, with one fatal glance; turn onlookers to stone. Mortal Medusa was killed by Perseus. The fresh seaweed he used to wrap her severed head transformed into blood-red stone. When he lay her head down on the shore of the Red Sea, Medusa's blood flowed into the water, forming the coral reefs. Rumour also has it that the undersea palace of Poseidon, god of oceans and earthquakes, was formed of coral. Was this an aquatic Taj Mahal? A memorial to Poseidon's beloved, the beautiful Medusa, transformed to a monster by wrathful Athena when she discovered god and nymph making love in her temple?

The coral's single opening is its eye on the world; food sensor, mouth, vagina and birth-giver. Coral remains a chthonic symbol in some cultures, the apotropaic eye, warding off the evil of the underworld. Too late for Medusa, but her story still resonates; soft coral sea fans and sea whips are scientifically classified as Gorgonacea, while ghostly jellyfish are called Medusas.

I walk among the dead coral massives. They are seductively tactile. My fingers trace the intricate patterns and billowy curves of the dead polyp colonies. Nerves jitter on roughness; cat's tongue, sharkskin, coarse-grade sandpaper, ground glass. Underwater, corals can look like terry toweling or chenille, even velvet; rich illuminated tapestries carelessly bunched in baskets. The soft, luxurious nap of millions of tiny buds, glowing like ruby and garnet, amber and lapis lazuli. Cut myself on this ungentle illusion of the sea and the cut will effloresce from the rich ragout of bacteria, my skin will stain coral and my blood expel its own polyps of

inflammation.

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Ariel, the air-spirit turned sea-nymph, sings

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that
were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
into something rich and strange

Some people still subscribe to the myth that coral will grow in human flesh. Believe the myth and a tiny shard of coral piercing my flesh could work its barbed way in, to ossify a rich and strange bloom. I could produce my own miracle of calcification, the bones of the sea budding in my veins, coral branches generating from my blood, erupting from my skin. But I cannot regenerate this coral. My palm scrapes on dead calcium, a dental nightmare of cavities. Shells, corallites, absence. Hollow host to sad winds and small scuttling spiders.

Five of us have come to this wasteland. The four young Nias men, Hendri, Kasih, Cornel and Darman, are my co-workers on a United Nations humanitarian Aid project that is rebuilding houses destroyed in the earthquake. We wander, lured by the grim beauty of the vast heads of coral. Funereal purple, not yet drained by sunlight, still mottles their depths and undersides. We are numb; there is nothing to say.

Kasih calls me, breaking the spell. He has found a large clam, about thirty centimetres across, deeply embedded in a huge brain coral. Only the lips protrude but the surrounding coral has left space for the clam to open. It is large enough to hold, if not a human foot (that stuff of ripping yarns), then at least a hand. The lips of its scalloped, gaping mouth are tinged blue, like the last gasp of the dying. A sulphur yellow stain lingers deep in the throat. The wizened leaf-brown husk of the mollusc rattles in there too.

We stare. I imagine that time of upheaval and its aftermath, those hours of blackness, the sea streaming from orifices and pores. The life filter, the dense saline balm, stripped away like skin being flayed, the dumb shriek of marine animals exposed to the sear of night air. And then sunlight, and those waterbodies slowly, inexorably,

beginning to heat. To simmer. The spit and split of secret flesh. Boiling to vapour with thin whistlings. Dying slowly.

Kasih looks at me and says, 'How it must have suffered.' It is eighteen months since the earthquake tore his island apart, shredding its physical and social fabric. Each of these young men has experienced the anguish of losing family, friends, homes and livelihood. I gaze at the sky. Clouds brood above us in deepening greys, fluffing their feathers like dispossessed hens, their eggs stolen. It is not the first time I cry in Nias.

On the Day of Remembrance, March twenty-eight, 2006 I was in another graveyard. The sadness of this new section of cemetery in Gunungsitoli, the capital of Nias, welled from its sudden and recent manifestation; one year since the earthquake. The raw earth still bled. The graveyard holds two hundred and thirty two souls, each headstone inscribed with the same date of death. Many bear multiple inscriptions. One lists seven family members; the youngest, at two months, killed with both his parents. One-year-old graves like this dot island hillsides and, according to custom, household front yards.

When the brief ceremony finished I joined the queues of silent people who slipped between the graves like shadows. We took handfuls of chopped leaves and flowers from baskets proffered by schoolchildren, and scattered these pieces of life gently over the graves of the dead. Sorrow, disbelief and regret drifted to earth like green rain.

Nias sits just north of the equator. The pale, narrow beaches are fringed by serried palms and casuarinas. Behind them the land rises to a jumble of low peaks and rounded hills. Fragile, red clay hills, ready to give solidity the slip during abundant rains. The land wears a luxuriant pelt of coconut and sago palms, bananas, rambutans, mangosteen, longan, mangoes and their robust queni cousins. The taller trees, species of *Ficus* and big scraggly durians, shoulder through the dense canopy gasping for sunlight. It is classic rainforest, complex and stable, in a mature cycle of germination, growth, expansion, competition, victory, defeat, death and decay.

In river valleys and slopes not too slippery for foothold, there are

small-scale plantations of cocoa and elegantly cicatrised rubber trees. The ground is carpeted with moss and ferns, sweet potato, cassava. Flatter land is terraced, flaunting a rice-field kaleidoscope; soil cappuccino-rich with inundation, fluoro-lush new growth, the maturing emerald carpet that seems to suck blue from the sky, the gold of harvest. Up to three crops a year. This is a raw, fecund, mysterious island of wonderful biodiversity. The sea erupts with shoals of small silver flying fish, forests teem with butterflies, dragonflies, bats, lizards, hand-span spiders on cable-webs. Half a million people live on Nias. Rural women bear six or eight children and appear old by the time they are forty. Nature is rampant, demanding and sometimes brutal. Two years after the earthquake many people still live in shattered homes, or hunch inside temporary structures wrought of broken planks, tin and twitched wire. Too poor, or too financially devastated to rebuild, they wait for promised aid.

What happens in an earthquake? Choose your straw. Variables include seismic depth, location, topography, geology, weather, intensity, fault lines. Imagine watching a playful dog pounce on a textured green rug, lock it between his teeth, shake and tear it. The dog, loses interest, carelessly drops the rug back on the sea-smooth blue floor and trots away. For two heart stopping minutes Nias curled, cracked, and split at the seams. The island pleated, mountainsides fell, bridges were shrugged off pylons, power supplies were destroyed, the sea chomped away mouthfuls of coast. A myriad of fault-lines schismed, tearing apart roads and houses. On one section of coast the homes of fishing families sank to their windowsills as the shaking sand beneath them liquefied. Soon after, sixty two houses and twenty five metres of beach disappeared for good in a tsunami.

Ironically, despite the loss of life, shelter, and infrastructure, and the destruction of protective mangrove, coconut and casuarina habitat along coastal areas, some scientists believe the lifting of the reefs may have helped shield Nias from far greater tsunami damage.

At the south-eastern end of Nias, Lagundri Bay opens to the sea like a

giant polyp. The bay's narrow neck hosts a wave revered by board riders. Considered one of the best right breaks in the world, the wave runs alongside the shelf reef and on (and on and on) into the bay. On any day surfers from a dozen different nations, emerge from their rooms in cheap Sorake Beach losmens, grab their boards and pick their way across the broad coral platform to wave Mecca. This shelf reef was also uplifted to above high tide level by the cataclysm. When word got out of earthquake damage at Sorake, internet sites were blasted with the same question; What happened to The Wave?

The shelf reef fans around Sorake in a flat skirt, two to three hundred metres wide, before it meets the thunder of open sea. Walk over this dead coral and hear the sighing music of the voids; the sea laments in endless cavities and erupts in small geysers through empty coral pipes. But living corals survive under the dead crust. Deep fissures reveal seaweed ruffled crevices and chasms, jewelled with crabs, glowing anemones, the secret neon-cobalt eye of sea urchins, and tiny flickering fish.

When I first visited Sorake at Easter 2006 the shelf reef was slick with rotting yellow weed and slime, the air a sulphurous miasma. The wave had survived and surfers still made the two day pilgrimage from Sumatra, but catastrophe is bad for business. Villagers who'd invested their meagre fishing income into surf-tourism were struggling. A month later the smell was gone and the sea alchemised the reef into a mirror. I spoke to Titus, whose nearly completed losmen was shattered by the earthquake. He told me this was the first time the sea had returned to the reef. By July, sixteen months after the earthquake, the high tide was washing a metre of surf across the corals.

Is the reef sinking back into the sea? Aerial photographs suggest this possibility. Nias sits on the edge of the Indo-Australian tectonic plate which is slowly subducting, grinding under the Eurasian plate at a rate of about fifty millimetres a year. But the current rate of settling seems much faster.

SurfAid International was already involved in tsunami rehabilitation projects at Sorake when the earthquake wreaked a new round of devastation on the southern

villages and its provincial capital, Teluk Dalam. They were the first international NGO (non government organisation) to assist in recovering bodies, erecting temporary shelters, sourcing and administering medical aid. Slowly the Aid trickle became a flow. Now dozens of Indonesian and international NGOs, as well as various arms of the UN, are helping Nias back onto its feet. This is a poor island, survival is at subsistence level for many inhabitants. Locals claim Nias is Indonesia's forgotten island. Certainly Indonesians from more wealthy and sophisticated parts of the archipelago sometimes refer dismissively to Nias as primitive, citing the island's megalithic culture and head-hunting past as evidence.

Nias is mesmerised by the inflow of international Aid workers. Money and muscle for the forgotten island. For humanitarian workers the bandaid solution can be a circulatory dilemma. Cynicism abounds. I talk to a young Australian engineer who is not so much jaded by the rebuilding task as overwhelmed by the complexity of the Aid effort to disaster areas, both natural and war-generated, not only in Indonesia but world-wide. 'What's the point?' he muses. 'Are we simply reshuffling the pack? Poor people whose threadbare shacks were destroyed receive new houses, while others, luckier or harder working, but not earthquake affected, get no help. Westerners come in expensive hiking boots and new four-wheel-drives, they flaunt US dollars, fly to overseas resorts for R&R, drink alcohol, and draw big salaries. Then they leave. What changes? Some people are better off, but poverty, unemployment and land degradation remain. The locals, having glimpsed how the First World lives, are left with their hands out, wanting more.'

'But in Australia we have a welfare safety net,' I counter. 'Unemployment benefits, pensions for the disadvantaged, drought, fire, flood relief. If the government doesn't come to the party, then, ideally, the community does. If disaster struck your family and you were offered assistance, you'd take it, the same as people of Nias do. Communities rally to maintain the stability of individual elements, both on a local and global scale.'

Another circular discussion centres



on priorities; which has primary importance, people or environment? There is environmental chaos in Nias whenever it rains heavily, especially where soils were starved by nitrogen-raping nilam bushes, grown to produce patchouli oil. With a world market boom and soil fertility quickly depleting, more and more jungle was slashed and burnt for new nilam plantings. At the end of a decade massive floods tore exhausted soils apart, and rivers bled silt kilometres out to sea. Now Aid projects focus on rebuilding damaged roads and river-courses. Impoverished villagers spend their days in turbid rivers, feeling for rocks with their feet, which they pile for sale on roadsides. Some are laboriously smashed with hammers into gravel for road construction, others are purchased for filling the wire Gabion baskets used to stabilise the stone-denuded river-courses. Catch 22.

Multinational corporations are ever ready to persuade poor villagers to sell their subsistence landholdings for monoculture oil palm plantations. This has happened throughout Sumatra, even on precipitous mountainsides. Without Aid to help rebuild the lives and livelihoods of the people of Nias, and bolster sustainability, there is a strong likelihood their fragile land will be sold off for palm-oil plantations. The profits going offshore, the villagers left dispossessed and destitute.

Reefs are complex communities. Most corals share their corallite walls, and share their gut with single cell algae called zooxanthellae. By consuming the polyps' nitrogenous wastes, these miniature recycling experts fuel themselves to help photosynthesise sunlight into the sugars corals need for ninety-eight percent of their food requirement. Symbiosis is a fine balance.

On a small atoll with an uplifted tutu of shelf reef, I pick my way through pools where corals fight on, apparently adapting to the sun warmed water. Crown of Thorns starfish as large as dinner plates are everywhere I look, some red, most a brilliant and seductive violet. Grotesquely beautiful, their long thorns contrive to look velvety. They move in slow motion, feeding on the dying polyps, and on the living. Where the starfish have fed the coral is scarred grey, colour and polyps gone. When the

reef is stressed the balance is tipped.

One starfish is on its back, its mouth and the radiating pattern of its tube feet exposed. Feet it uses to pull out its stomach sack, which it spreads over the corals, flooding them with digestive juices, sucking the dissolving polyps until only the stark calcium carbonate skeleton remains. Its fourteen arms curl upwards at the tips. It doesn't look happy. I turn it back over with the toe of my sandal. The arms move slowly, tubicles undulate, an echinoderm shrugs its spiny skin. Shrugs off my touch and resumes feeding. I am reminded of the palm-oil developers; profit is all that counts. Fragile environments are easily unbalanced.

A young girl of seven or eight dances on a broken road in a nylon overlay dress, one clearly passed down through many riverbank washings. The nylon, almost drained of colour, is a nondescript pink. The child laughs, skipping and twirling, clearly loving her dress, its frills and flounces, the way the sunlight turns its nylon filaments to rainbow. She has no need for colours, she can conjure them, knowing that when the frills lift with her spinning, the bleached nylon remembers its genesis; rose and vermilion, coral brightness.

Nias fanned her reef skirts like this, sea green and aqua shot through with sunshafts, the blue-veiled flicker of scale and fin, depths luminous with purple, rose and scarlet, and shadows trembling with gold. A fluorescent dance by day, a swirl of bioluminescence by night. But where the skirt's frill lifted and tore, the rich life of the inner reef was

extinguished. Damage which is likely to be compounded; tectonics experts predict more major cataclysms in the Sumatran region within the next thirty years.

Coral reefs nurture a huge repository of ocean biodiversity. The balance for their survival, and that of the complex life-chains dependent on them, including human, is tipping. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Summary for Policymakers, released in February 2007, warns unequivocally of rising sea levels and an increase in natural disasters over the next generation. Prospects are ominous, not only for the reefs but for all low-lying habitats and communities, both human and non-human. Population re-location consequent on rising seas will prove a massive drain on the international Aid bucket.

If global warming means the miracle happens, and rising sea-levels restore the dead reefs of Nias to their natural element, it will be an empty miracle. Increased ocean acidity and sedimentation will make potential recolonisation by drifting coral polyps unlikely. With coral bleaching, due to rising ocean temperatures, projected at around ninety percent, there will be few coral polyps left to drift. Unless there is an immediate, massive, global effort to slow the rate of climate change, brittle coral catacombs may be all that remains of the world's reefs; their exquisite colour and diversity reduced to a shadowy memory. 🐾

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