



# TASMANIA

## *treasure isle under threat*

by Gerry McSweeney, Conservation Director, RF&BPS

*"Two centuries ago, south of the smallest continent and set in the wildest seas, there was an island which exemplified the beauty and complexity of the whole world's wild face. Remote, wind-swept shores and ranges, heathlands, snow-fed streams and damp, life-filled forests. No canvas, symphony or temple compares with its wild intricate beauty."*

**Bob Brown, A Time to Care.**

*"Tasmania's settlement by uneasy and frightened Europeans saw a savage attack on everything that made this land so different, so hostile to them. The native people were persecuted to the brink of extinction. The silences of vast forests were splintered by the crash of falling trees. The wind itself was put to work; it fanned the flames as fires razed the island's woodlands. And the emptiness, the fearful loneliness of the wide spaces were dispelled as settlers built roads, houses and fences: achievements, visible and reassuring. At last the countryside conformed."*

*Tasmania has been made comfortable and safe. Scenes of farmland and historic township please the European eye, and a still wilder beauty can be found along the roads that penetrate so deeply into the once remote mountains. But so often the roads end in the scars of dam works or logging operations. The visitor finds that the assault on Tasmania's wilds continues: forest are wood-chipped; the western rivers drown unmourned; and fires, often deliberately lit, eradicate the remnant Ice Age forest of King Billy and pencil pine.*

*Tasmania is still an incredibly*

*beautiful island. But so much of its is a beauty betrayed, like the mountains mirrored in the grave of the flooded Lake Pedder. Only in the remoteness of wilderness can be found the wholly unaffected beauty of nature, and only in the Central Highlands and South-West of Tasmania can be found true wilderness.*

*But if the destruction has intensified, then so too has the manifestation of our concern for this land. Mountains and rivers that appeared in the first awkward paintings of western Tasmania today inspire evocative photography. The eager exploratory expeditions today inspire bush-walkers and canoeists. In response to the same vision that saw the first great national parks proclaimed in the 1920s, Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments alike have nominated those areas for World Heritage listing. And the lonely cries for wilderness, so eccentric fifty or a hundred years ago, have coalesced into a persuasive voice heard the world over. Whether arguing on scientific, economic or spiritual grounds, the advocates of wilderness are linked by an intuitive conviction that to destroy these last fragments of wild Earth is akin to destroying ourselves."*

**Geoff Law Franklin Blockade.**

**T**asmanians write about their land with a passion shared by many New Zealanders. Their words echo sentiments that we too feel strongly. Both our cultures and our history of European settlement and exploitation of the land and its native people are similar, even though New Zealand was never a convict settlement. Both countries are buffeted

Cradle Mountain — Lake St Clair National Park, Western Tasmania World Heritage Area. by the roaring forties and in recent times were heavily scarred by Ice Age glaciations.

Our links stretch far beyond the last 200 years of European settlement. Until about 50 million years ago, New Zealand, Tasmania (then joined with Australia), South America and Antarctica were linked as the southern super-continent of Gondwanaland.

Crustal movement separated Gondwanaland and as the land masses parted they each carried a sample of the ancestral beech (*Nothofagus*) rainforest, and other plants and animals including ancestral ratites which evolved into New Zealand's moas and kiwi and Australia's emu and cassowary. The Australian continent drifted slowly northwards. Its original plants and animals were boosted

*Fagus* (*Nothofagus gunnii*) a deciduous Tasmanian beech of exposed bushline and sub-alpine areas turns hillsides brilliant orange-yellow for a few weeks in autumn.

