

Huon Pine — a major tourist attraction

The Huon pine (*Lagarostrobus franklinii*), a close relative of New Zealand's silver pine, grows alongside rivers on Tasmania's West Coast. Today it is the State's rarest forest association. It is slow growing and can live for up to 3,000 years. Formerly widespread, it has now been almost eliminated as a forest association because of logging for its prized resilient timber and through flooding by hydro lakes. A major craft and tourism industry has now developed around the timber which in appearance resembles our kahikatea. The present annual timber cut of 200-300 cubic metres is almost exclusively used for high quality craft-ware. Even Huon pine woodshavings sell for \$1 in small bags labelled "Product of the world's last temperate rainforest". Eat your hearts out New Zealand West Coasters! There is no replanting of Huon pine and the few significant mature stands that remain are unreserved and threatened by helicopter logging. The present supply largely comes from 8,700 m³ of timber salvaged before the Gordon River and Lake Pedder were flooded in 1972.

Woodchipping is the major threat to Tasmania's remaining dry eucalypt forest. In the space of only four years (1969-73) the State's major forest industry switched from sawmilling to wood chipping involving clearfelling primarily of dry eucalypt forest. Twenty-six of Tasmania's 30 eucalypt species occur in these forests which have a very high species diversity. After chipping, many of the areas are converted to farmland, the remainder are often regenerated and where this is successful become single species tree farms.

Tasmanian conservationists are seeking a 14,000 hectare national park for the largest remaining unmodified area of dry eucalypt forest in the Douglas-Apsley valleys on the east coast.

Roads threaten grasslands

Tasmania's natural grasslands and grassy woodlands were once extensive in the centre of the island. Today they have been reduced to remnant patches in cemeteries, railway embankments, golf courses and roadside verges. Even here they are not safe. The huge Australian Commonwealth Bicentennial road improvement programme is likely to polish off the remnants and the race is on against the bulldozer to identify and reserve these natural grasslands.

About 20 percent of Tasmania's plant species are either unprotected or poorly protected in reserves. Scientists and conservation groups have documented a network of bioreerves aimed at protecting

all Tasmania's endemic plant species.

As well as seeking better protection for Tasmania's native plant communities, Australian conservationists are battling hard to preserve wilderness areas in the south and the north-west of Tasmania. To do this they want substantial enlargement of the present National Parks in Western Tasmania. This is the only way to prevent logging, mining, and hydro dam construction.

Dams destroy wilderness

They have an enormous challenge before them. Tasmania has a long tradition of environmental destruction. Lake Pedder was flooded in 1972 after huge protest. The Liberal Premier of Tasmania, Robin Gray and his dam-loving colleagues, still feel very bitter towards conservationists. In 1983, the Australian High Court empowered the Federal



The Gordon River was dammed in 1972 despite huge public protest. Today dead trees scar its fluctuating shoreline and bear testimony to a fate which our Lake Manapouri narrowly avoided.

Mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is the world's tallest hardwood tree. After pressure from the timber industry this forest was excised from Mt Field National Park in the 1950s for logging.



Government to stop the Tasmanian State Government building the Franklin-Gordon dam in South-West Tasmania. The dam site and river were the scene of huge public protest and even world-famous botanist David Bellamy was arrested. The Franklin dam issue became a key Federal election issue in 1983. The Tasmanian Labour opposition are little better. In March 1985, Opposition Leader Ken Wreidt stated "we stand by the view that we should develop our hydro resources to the maximum....".

One of the leaders in the campaign against more hydro dams in Tasmania's wild south-west, Wilderness Society's Bob Burton, has produced an excellent report called "Overpowering Tasmania". This reveals that the Tasmanian Hydro Electric Commission's power demand projections have grossly over-estimated demand. The State has an embarrassing oversupply of power which can only be sold at bargain basement prices. Present and planned hydro power developments in the rugged west are hideously expensive and far more costly than low pollution thermal generation from low sulphur coal in the north-east of the State.



The tiny pigmy possum is found mainly in Tasmania and nests under bark and in hollow trees. Pigmy possum need natural forests to survive because clearfelled, burnt and regenerated forests contain no old trees and are burnt at regular intervals to reduce "trash".

Photo: Anne Wapstra