



TASMANIAN | Land | CONSERVANCY



Dawn, frosty pool and Mount Wright from the Vale of Rasselas, with Gordonvale forest in middle ground

Issue 35 Summer 2012

Gordonvale - our latest permanent reserve project

Remote sensor cameras in action

TLC board announcements

Join us at the Vale of Belvoir

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We are very pleased to announce our latest permanent reserve project to raise funds to acquire an iconic property, known to many bushwalkers as Gordonvale.

This small parcel of privately owned land is tucked away in a remote corner of south-west Tasmania. It is completely surrounded by the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and, while technically not in the national park, this 80.87 ha block has World Heritage Area status and shares all the values of the surrounding area. Because of its unique history, Gordonvale is registered in the Tasmanian Historic Archaeological Sites Catalogue (THASC 8112-009). It is now advertised for sale on the open market and due to its combination of remoteness, spectacular scenery and fascinating history of settlement, is at risk of being sold for development.

Upon hearing of its plight, it was not difficult to convince a group of hardy TLC staff and supporters to make the trek into Gordonvale in late August to evaluate its values. The expedition was made even more rewarding when Grant Dixon, one of Australia's leading wilderness photographers and

geomorphologists, was able to join us. As a track monitoring officer with the Parks and Wildlife Service, Grant has made this trek many times before and has an intimate knowledge of Tasmania's World Heritage Area and its evolution. He also knew exactly where to find the fallen log to cross the Gordon River which, as it turned out, was pretty handy.

Gordonvale is nestled in a large glacial valley known as the Vale of Rasselas, traditional home territory of the Pangerninghe clan of the Big River nation. By foot it is four hours walking from the Florentine Valley via Maydena, but as the raven flies it is just west of New Norfolk in the lonely Denison Range. After inching our way across the Gordon River log, we were spellbound by the spectacular snow-covered peaks of Mount Wright (1,083m), Bonds Craig (1,219m), Great Dome (1,232m) and Wylds Craig (1,286m) surrounding us. The Vale of Rasselas itself is typical of the broad valleys in the south-west, containing a mosaic of undulating buttongrass plains, riparian vegetation along the creeks and river terraces, grading to scrub and eucalypt forest

continued inside cover

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Photo: Grant Dixon

Denison Range from the Vale of Rasselas, Gordonvale forest in foreground



Photo: Grant Dixon

Gordonvale forest adjacent to a pool in the Vale of Rasselas

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on the better drained, higher ground. Formed thousands of years ago during Pleistocene times, the area is anchored in alluvial sands, gravel and mud, from which terraces rise to an elevated forest platform. Small pools are scattered throughout, teeming with frogs and other aquatic life.

Gordonvale's story of settlement centres around the legendary figure of Ernie Bond, a Tasmanian bushman, who was first attracted to the nearby area of Adamsfield to mine osmiridium metal. Ernie arrived in Adamsfield in 1927 and, after establishing a successful business, purchased and named nearby Gordonvale in 1934 where he planned to retire and grow vegetables. He eventually built a four-roomed house from timber he split on-site and, over time, developed Gordonvale into a thriving little settlement with extensive gardens and outbuildings. Ernie lived at Gordonvale for 18 years but sadly the remnants of his homestead have now disintegrated except for stone foundations and scattered farm implements.

Every year about 350 bushwalkers make the return trip to Lake Rhona via Gordonvale and some of them possibly know of Ernie's generous hospitality and legendary pioneering spirit. Like our team, bushwalkers need to be totally self-reliant and prepared for all weather extremes. During our trek we

experienced bright sun mixed with light showers, heavy rain and hail, all so typical of south-west walking. Although the access track was relatively flat, it was braided and boggy and with every step we sank into deep peaty ruts. We arrived at Gordonvale by late afternoon and on our approach all that was visible of the settlement were the remnants of the post and rail fence, discarded implements, and some huge eucalypts felled long ago for milling or firewood. The site was bordered by fast flowing creeks and cloaked in lush ferns and exquisite mosses and lichens, giving a fairy-tale appearance. One of the first birds to be seen was the elusive endemic scrub tit carrying nesting material into a clump of melaleucas, and nearby a pair of beautiful pink robins fossicked under manferns. After exploring the surrounds we set our tents in a grassy clearing and, after a chilly evening meal, awoke to minus two degrees and frozen boots.

While we did not record any threatened species of flora or fauna, it was obvious the area retains a rich biodiversity due to its pristine surrounds. There were remnant patches of rainforest in the creek-lined gullies including myrtle and celery top pine and sphagnum moss beds in the open buttongrass plains. Gordonvale's management issues would be few. Apart from the small patch of rhododendrons and spring bulbs, no weeds were detected, and all visible

signs of the area's previous occupation were gradually being consumed by the encroaching wilderness. Gordonvale's greatest natural asset is its context. Although private in tenure, ecologically this parcel of land is intrinsic and seamless in the vast World Heritage Area landscape. Its context alone makes a compelling reason for its purchase and permanent protection through a conservation covenant.

Now for sale on the open market, Gordonvale is at risk of development which, over time, will inevitably erode its robustness and resilience. Perhaps the greatest potential threat would be the attraction of more people to the area. With increased visitation come impacts like pests, weeds and disease and the push to upgrade facilities. At present little needs to be done other than to secure Gordonvale's future protection and keep its legendary memory alive. With your help the TLC can achieve this sensitively and carefully without the need for visitation or development. From our perspective, Gordonvale is a jigsaw piece waiting to be reunited with its surrounding landscape, to complete the picture.

Dr Sally Bryant

Conservation Reserves Manager

protecting Tasmanian land for biodiversity



Photo: Grant Dixon

Abandoned plough at Gordonvale

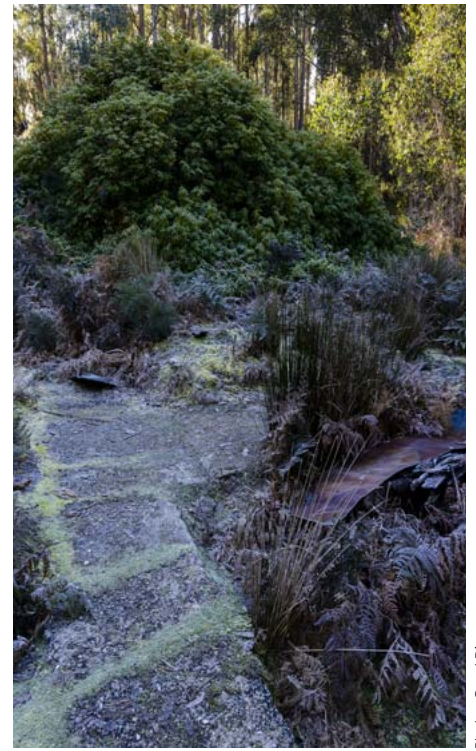


Photo: Grant Dixon

Path around the old homestead, Gordonvale

Ernie Bond - the hermit of Gordonvale

Journalist and keen bushwalker, John Cannon, kindly agreed to document the fascinating history of Ernie Bond for our newsletter. Thank you John. Here is his story:

Ernie Bond was a larger than life character whose hospitality belied his 'hermit' tag.

His diaries (held in State Archives) indicate he employed six people (sometimes less) on his farm in the wilderness. They were supplying fruit, vegetables and meat for the miners and their families at Adamsfield.

Osmiridium mining at Adamsfield started in 1924, and Ernie arrived on the field in September 1927. He worked some of the leases of the Stacey brothers which his mother had bought. His real reasons for quitting Hobart for the south-west are lost in the sands of time, but the breakdown of his marriage was a component while others ominously allude to too much of a liking for the 'high life'.

Born in 1891 Ernie had a privileged childhood: his father, a bark mill owner and property developer, became a politician in both of Tasmania's houses of parliament. Adamsfield was (26 miles) 40 kms from the road end at June. All gear and food had to be carried in along the corded track by packers carrying corn sacks tied to their backs with loads

of up to 200lbs.

Then Ernie struck upon the idea of growing fruit and vegetables and raising stock to feed the miners. He found a patch of relatively fertile land north of the Great Bend in the Gordon River and beneath Mount Wright. He moved there in 1934. He lost some of his 200 sheep in the extensive buttongrass plains where malnutrition was an ever-present problem for livestock.

Using the route over Packers Spur to a saddle south of the highest point of The Thumbs, it was only 12 kms as the crow

flies from Gordonvale to Adamsfield.

Ernie and his employees would tote loads of fresh produce and meat over the quartzite ridge, including fresh fruit in season or big Vacola jars of preserves (six at a time) out of season.

"Dad had a Vacola bottling outfit, and would preserve hundreds of bottles of raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries and blackcurrants. Then he'd carry them over to Adamsfield to sell, and he'd also make wonderful pies", his son young Ernie said when I interviewed him 12 years ago.

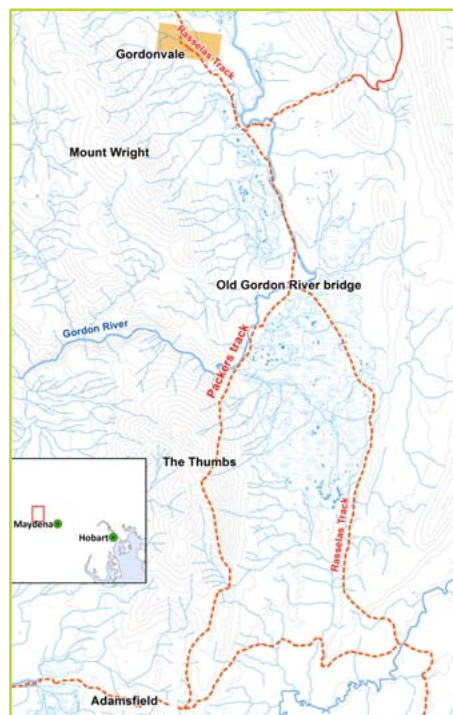
"Dad knew the bush really well. He learnt more about the birds from Crosbie Morrison, the well-known naturalist, who spent some time out there. He'd feed a whole lot of birds along the rail outside.

He was tremendously strong and about six foot four with great hairy arms. He wouldn't so much knead the bread as pummel it. Then he'd stick his arm in the long bush oven to test the temperature.

He was an avid listener to his battery radio, and read widely; his appetite even ran to Commonwealth hansards!

The people who persuaded Dad to move into the city meant well. But I think he would have been happier staying on at Gordonvale until he died, because he really loved life in the wild."

Later on, after virtually everyone had



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Old chaff cutter, Gordonvale relic



Chaff cutter detail, Gordonvale relic

left Adamsfield, it would have been hard to make a business case for Ernie staying on at Gordonvale. He had ceased to have employees, and his visitors were by then mainly bushwalkers. He could see them approaching on the buttongrass plains and would have a brew of tea, hot bread, jam, honey and even wallaby stew ready for them. Every visitor was made to feel important as a guest.

Ernie's honey mead was a notoriously potent brew with wing and sting visible in its dregs. It had the most impact on a somewhat dehydrated bushwalker. The bottles were put in a bush fridge with damp hessian over the top but some of the bottles would still explode. Ernie's other house specialty was cherry wine which was sipped after the evening meal.

His diary faithfully records all letters received, and during World War II none were more anxiously awaited than those from young Ernie serving overseas with the Army.

After the death of his horse Ginge, Ernie had to carry all his gear and supplies in and out. He was forced to leave in 1952 after the bridge across the Gordon Bend was destroyed by fire, and he also had some health issues. Members of both the Hobart and Launceston Walking Clubs carried all his gear out for him. He died in 1962.

In late 1967 when I first visited Gordonvale en route to Lake Rhona

(a name that Ernie had proposed to honour an Irish lass Rhona Warren, who was one of the first three women to walk in there), we had a breather among the old buildings. The main one was still standing but not the covered way between that and the office. We could not identify which of the other subsiding structures were the bakehouse, the love nest (once occupied by a young married couple who worked for him), the barn or the pig pen. Back at the car after the walk we switched on the radio and heard the Prime Minister had disappeared in the surf that morning.

When I returned less than ten years later, an F-111 aircraft skimmed over the usually serene Vale of Rasselas. The office was leaning heavily on a strong beam and all the other buildings had collapsed. By 1982 when the World Heritage Area was declared, one might have reasonably thought that the 80 hectare Gordonvale property would be subsumed within it.

But that did not take account of a wealthy American businessman, Martin Polin, who had arrived in Tasmania some years earlier as part of his plan to escape Armageddon. He put in a request for real estate agents to advise him of any remote wilderness properties that came onto the market. He bought 23 such properties, and he told me on the phone that Gordonvale was the only one he had not visited. Although he 'hankered to take a helicopter ride' in there, he never did. He

invested more of his energy into Circular Marsh near the Pine River—a Central Plateau equivalent of Gordonvale with its own array of decaying old farm buildings built by Dennis Allen. It was at this property that he installed a bunker of supplies, and it was to here that he would have retreated in the event of a nuclear accident or the Cold War getting too hot. Most of his family did not share his vision and went back to California.

Following Martin Polin's death in 2007, Gordonvale was placed on the market in 2011 along with other properties he had acquired. Now the TLC is the preferred purchaser and hopefully new custodians of this very special place.

John Cannon

By supporting the conservation of this World Heritage value property, your tax-deductible donation of \$300 or more will be acknowledged on a commemorative plaque.

Thank you to Grant Dixon for accompanying us on our trip to Gordonvale and donating his time and professional photography skills and images to our Gordonvale project. More information about Grant's work can be found at GrantDixonPhotography.com.au



Long-nosed potoroo (*Potorous tridactylus*) foraging on Chris Read's property at Birchs Bay



Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) also recorded on Chris Read's property

Using remote sensing cameras for nature conservation

In the previous issue of the newsletter we discussed our plans to install remote sensor cameras across our permanent reserves. This technology is becoming a universal tool among environmental managers worldwide, due to the ease of operation and relative low cost compared to other survey methods.

Such cameras are also assisting private landholders in the Protected Areas on Private Land program (PAPL) to gather an array of invaluable information about their properties. The PAPL program works with landowners to manage important natural values on private land. The ability to capture images of many of our native fauna species, which are typically nocturnal and cryptic, can confirm species presence and provide greater insights into their movements through the landscape. Historically this would have required detailed survey work by trained professionals. The impact of these images can be quite powerful, highlighting the importance of conservation efforts in protecting critical habitats for many rare and threatened species.

Significant conservation outcomes are being made on private land across Tasmania. The intricate knowledge that many private landholders have relating to their land is vital in building a better understanding of our biodiversity and how best to conserve it into the future. Many landholders recall stories such as a devil that set up residence under the veranda or a spotted-tailed quoll that was caught rummaging through the compost scraps. These anecdotal stories

are a valuable source of information and emphasise the connection many landholders have to the animals which share their property.

The PAPL program has been running for eleven years as a partnership between the state and federal governments and the TLC. The goal is to ensure people are aware of special natural values that may be present on their properties and to encourage their protection through voluntary conservation agreements.

Recently staff working on the PAPL program have begun to use remote sensing cameras on private properties across the state. To date the cameras have been able to confirm the presence of numerous species on a number of private properties, highlighting to landholders the importance of conservation.

Private landholder Chris Read was one of the first to trial the cameras on his property at Birchs Bay with great results. Chris commented, "While we were aware of a good deal of devil activity in this area over many years with frequent scats and tracks, I've never actually observed devils myself so it was good to see we have at least three healthy well grown animals in just one area alone. Less pleasant, but very important, was the recording of two feral cats at the camera site. This has focussed my mind on the cat problem generally and I will be trying to come up with a strategy in the near future. I'm also able to refer to the images as part of our interpretive work for visitors to the property."

The cameras are positioned in locations of ideal habitat or in areas where there

is evidence of fauna activity such as observed scats or tracks or a visible animal run, or based on a landholder's anecdotal observations. Depending on the model and amount of animal activity, the cameras can be left in situ for weeks, capturing images or short videos of fauna activity when the motion and/or heat sensor is triggered. The images captured can assist landholders with monitoring native and introduced species patterns to gauge the effectiveness of management strategies, eg feral animal control on their properties for the protection of specific habitats.

"Images of animals are difficult to obtain as a working landowner - they require time, patience and some specialised photographic equipment - obviously these sensor camera images are not 'art house' images, but they are very instructive nonetheless", observed Chris.

If you are interested in learning more about The PAPL program and conservation covenants please contact us.

James Hattam
TLC Conservation Programs Officer.



James installing a sensor camera



Dr Wendy Potts



Wildflowers in bloom at the Vale of Belvoir TLC permanent reserve

TLC board changes

We would like to thank outgoing board member Wendy Potts, who has been a member of the TLC board since its inception in 2001. A professional botanist working with Tasmania's Threatened Species Section of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, Wendy's expertise has been invaluable in guiding the TLC's conservation management processes. We are fortunate to retain Wendy on our Conservation, Science and Planning Advisory Council, which reports to the TLC board.

Recently Philip Myer has also retired from the TLC board. We thank him for his input and wealth of industry knowledge which proved to be invaluable.

We are delighted to welcome Peter Downie and Jennie Churchill to the board. Peter is part of the farming community in Tasmania's biodiversity hotspot in the midlands, where his family have grazed sheep and cattle for 150 years. Jennie has more than 30 years of leadership and management experience across a range of professional fields including media, veterinary science/small business, not-for-profit leadership and government advisory roles.

We are very sorry to see staff member, Jo Naylor leave us. Jo has been with

Wildflower weekend - the Vale of Belvoir

the TLC since 2006 and undoubtedly contributed to the hardworking ethos of the TLC - her joyful presence will be sorely missed. We suspect that Jo will support TLC President Geoff Couser's recent claim that "the TLC is like the Hotel California...you can check out but you can never leave...". We hope so, anyway!

In 2008 we launched our ambitious project to raise funds to protect the magnificent Vale of Belvoir, near Cradle Mountain. In 2010, nearly 1000 supporters helped us achieve this conservation triumph of the 21st century.

In celebration of the permanent protection of this outstanding property, we are hosting two public open days on-site, on 2nd and 3rd February 2013.

Supporters will have the opportunity to experience the wildflowers at the peak of their summer splendour and talk with TLC staff and experts about the wonderful conservation values of the Vale.

Highlights of the weekend will include:

Bushwalks to the top of scenic Daisy Hill, which is a hotspot for the nationally endangered hoary sunray paperdaisy.

Leisurely strolls along the Vale River, with native orchids and other wildflowers scattered throughout the grassland.

An opportunity to visit the newly-installed interpretive signage that also includes acknowledgement of our supporters who donated \$200 or more to help protect this outstanding place of importance and natural beauty.

As the Vale of Belvoir is in a sub-alpine environment, supporters will need to wear clothing suitable for cold, warm or wet weather, and sturdy shoes. Visitors to Daisy Hill will need to be prepared to walk in hilly and occasionally rocky terrain and have a good level of fitness.

We would love to have you join us for a half to a full day, and spend the rest of the weekend exploring the wider area. BYO lunch and drinks. Anyone wishing to stay overnight in the area is recommended to make accommodation bookings early, as this is the peak season for visitors.

If you would like to experience first hand why the Vale of Belvoir is considered to be one of the most important places for conservation in Tasmania then please join us.

RSVP no later than Friday 11th January 2013 on (03) 6225 1399 or info@tasland.org.au.

We are grateful to the following organisations for their support in recent months

