



TASMANIAN | Land | CONSERVANCY



Photo: Matthew Newton

Gowan Brae | cultural heart of the central highlands a historic partnership with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community

Clyde Mansell, president of the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania and Jane Hutchinson, CEO of the Tasmanian Land Conservancy at Gowan Brae

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PO Box 2112, Lower Sandy Bay, TAS 7005

Tel: 03 6225 1399

www.tasland.org.au info@tasland.org.au

ABN 887 43 606 934

Story by Jane Hutchinson | CEO of TLC

The 10th of May this year was a day of great significance for the protection of the biodiversity conservation and Aboriginal cultural values of the properties Gowan Brae and Circular Marsh (together I will call them "Gowan Brae"). Over 80 people were invited by the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania, on the glorious, unseasonably warm autumn Friday to celebrate the innovative partnership between the Australian Government, Indigenous Land Corporation, Tasmanian Land Conservancy, Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania and Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre that secured Gowan Brae for Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Tasmanian Senator Lin Thorp, on behalf of the Australian Government said that she was thrilled by the partnership.

"The Gowan Brae project is a groundbreaking model for conservation in Tasmania.

"The partnership secures the long-term protection and management of a culturally and environmentally significant place," she said.

Under this historic partnership, the Australian Government, through the National Reserve System component of Caring for Our Country, and the

Indigenous Land Corporation generously provided grants to fund the purchase and the immediate management costs of Gowan Brae. The Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania is now the freehold owner of the land, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (a highly skilled land management organisation) is the reserve manager and TLC will provide ongoing support and assistance to manage the property for its conservation values, and will assist in establishing a philanthropic capital fund to support future reserve management.

I am personally delighted that TLC was involved in this collaboration. It is an innovative and important project - one of only a handful of its kind in Australia. The success of the partnership can be attributed to all parties sharing and continuing to share a common goal and a common purpose, which is to forever protect the biodiversity conservation values and the Aboriginal cultural values of this extraordinary place.

This partnership also propels the TLC into a new era. It is a growth in our maturity that we can partner in a significant land acquisition without having to be title holders. It is no less significant that through this collaboration the TLC has the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as neighbours, partners and friends.

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protecting Tasmanian land for biodiversity



Photo: Matthew Newton

The spotted-tailed quoll is just one of the many threatened species found at Gowan Brae



Photo: Matthew Newton

Gowan Brae soaking up the last of the day's sunshine

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Gowan Brae and its values

Gowan Brae is a vast, diverse and largely pristine property of 6,750 ha that connects and buffers the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, with which it shares a 30 kilometre boundary, and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy's Five Rivers properties. There is now an 18,000 hectare private protected area within this landscape, which is truly remarkable. Through this partnership we will be able to find out more about the cultural importance of our TLC properties as part of this landscape-scale reserve estate.

Wonderful habitat for the full range of highland animals can be found at Gowan Brae, where their social structures and behaviours have been unchanged for millennia.

Three wild rivers course through its heart; the Nive, Pine and Little Rivers. These flow freely throughout the dry summers and are flanked by rare native conifers as well as tea trees, waratahs and banksias.

Johnston Lagoon is a jewel in the north-west corner, a pristine natural lake sporting the threatened Clarence galaxias and fringed by reeds, cushion plants, sphagnum beds and grasslands. Having no discrete creek feeding it, this deep lake swells and contracts through the season, sometimes giving the impression there are mats of vegetation floating on the water.

Pristine grassy woodland areas and the

extensive, completely untouched old-growth forests of the north-eastern third of the property provide shelter to many of Tasmania's favourite animals, such as owls, pigmy possums, parrots and black cockatoos. These undisturbed old trees with grass understorey, particularly around the area flanking Flexmore Marsh, are quite unusual and probably indicate richer soils.

Of particular note at Gowan Brae is the presence of the nationally endangered 'alpine sphagnum bogs and associated fens', nestled in pristine wetlands and grassland glades.

Over 93 per cent of Gowan Brae is intact native vegetation. A little over 5 per cent in the south of the property has been cleared in the past, but is slowly regenerating.

The property is known to have at least five nationally endangered species, such as the iconic Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax fleayi*), Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*), the enigmatic native fish: Clarence galaxias (*Galaxias johnstoni*), the grassland paperdaisy (*Leucochrysum albicans*) and the miena cider gum (*Eucalyptus gunnii divaricata*).

Another 12 threatened species have been recorded at Gowan Brae including the spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*), eastern banded bandicoot (*Perameles gunnii*), grey goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*) and masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae castanops*).

Threatened plants such as a lovely little endemic perennial herb called Curtis' colobanth (*Colobanthus curtisiae*), the mountain hovea (*Hovea montana*), the shiny cheeseberry (*Planocarpa nitida*) and the small alpine leek orchid (*Prasophyllum tadgellianum*) all survive there.

Of course it is not just the biodiversity conservation values of this property that are of terrific importance, the land also has significant Aboriginal cultural values. Clyde Mansell, Chairman of the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania told me that the Gowan Brae purchase is "a milestone for reconciliation in Tasmania." Those words are something I will never forget.

In his words: "The Tasmanian Aboriginal community has never before witnessed collaboration of this nature in Tasmania.

"This property carries a virtually uninterrupted cultural landscape, which provides evidence of the past tracks used by our ancestors. It holds an abundance of traditional resources, some of which provide for ongoing cultural activities like basket making and also grants access for the contemporary Aboriginal community to traditional foods and medicines and an ochre site.

"The grassy plains that surround the property are a direct result of the 'fire-stick' burning of landscape carried out by our ancestors. The property will also offer greater opportunity for community visits, cultural participation and expression. The traditions and practices which can be



Photo: Matthew Newton

The Nive river as it makes its journey through Gowan Brae and on to TLC's Five Rivers reserves



continued on this landscape will help to achieve ongoing cultural well-being for Tasmanian Aborigines," he said.

After a walk across one of the many grassy plains, the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania's Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officer, Buck Brown, showed us two quarry sites. The poa grass formed knee high clumps along the plain. Perfect, I was told, for basket weaving. When we stopped at the second site Aboriginal artifacts were revealed by Buck, who demonstrated how his ancestors would have hammered the stone to create sharp tools for their own use and for trading.

TLC's Bruce Hay, who has worked in the central highlands for over 30 years, took one look at the site and knew instantly the significance of what he was seeing: "Oh you've really got something here mate... this is a real find," Bruce said.

The handcrafted splits in the small stones could only have been created one way, by Tasmanian Aboriginal people - Buck's ancestors.

The journey to acquisition

The journey to protect Gowan Brae for its incredible values started over 18 months ago when the TLC learnt that the property was for sale on the open market. We quickly went to contract on the property, subject to being able to raise the funds to acquire it.

Very fortunately the Australian Government, through the National Reserve System component of Caring for Our Country, agreed to grant two-thirds of the purchase price (\$2 million). It was during the process of further enquiry into the property that it became clear to the TLC (through stories and some documented evidence) that Gowan Brae, and the surrounding landscape, also has very significant Aboriginal cultural values.

After contacting the Indigenous Land Corporation to gauge their interest in funding the balance (\$1 million) under the Cultural and Environmental stream of their Land Acquisition Program, and contacting the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania to confirm our initial findings, we were on a path to an extraordinary and innovative partnership to acquire the property for the Aboriginal people of Tasmania.

Indigenous Land Corporation Chairperson Dr Dawn Casey said Gowan Brae would play a vital strategic role in helping to create a rich tapestry of protection in the area.

"Wilderness is precious, culture is precious and current and future generations will be able to enjoy and appreciate what has been created through this historic collaboration," she said.

The TLC's ongoing role

One of the requirements of the Australian Government's funding of the acquisition is that a conservation covenant will be registered against the Title of the land to protect its conservation values into the future. A steering group made up of Australian Government representatives, the TLC, the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre will work over the next year or so to develop the conservation covenant and the long-term philanthropic fund to support ongoing management costs.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal community, through the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, have expressed their deep commitment to protect Gowan Brae for its cultural and conservation values and we are equally committed to the ongoing role TLC will play in achieving that goal.

Before any decisions are made in relation to the property, including in relation to visitor access, the Tasmanian Aboriginal community will take time to connect with the land and conduct multiple surveys. These include cultural heritage and ecological surveys, with TLC, to ensure that more is known about this magnificent reserve that has, until now, received very little attention.

This historic purchase has ensured that a largely pristine, intact and culturally significant property now rests with the traditional custodians of the land.

The Gowan Brae bunker and early European history

Owned by the enigmatic Martin Polin for the last 40 plus years, the property has seen little European development, apart from a concrete bunker built at Circular Marsh to weather the anticipated nuclear fallout feared in the 1970s. Other infrastructure included two homestead sites from the 1800s. Limited logging took place in the 1970s and 1980s.

Early pioneers used the area for wool sheep grazing from the 1860s. Circular Marsh and Gowan Brae were settled permanently, along with nearby Roscarborough, Pine Tier and Serpentine around the turn of the 1900s. There were small areas drained by 'hump and hollow' where vegetables and fruit trees were established, but the native wildlife and the harsh weather prevented much success with this and certainly prevented any broad-scale agriculture. Remains of the old farmhouse can be seen today in the grassland valley of Circular Marsh.

Martin Polin, rumoured to be a retired judge from America, bought Gowan Brae and Circular Marsh in the 1970s. He used Circular Marsh as his main base in the area and built the 12 room bunker. About a dozen shipping containers are still there with the remains of the materials he gathered together to form the centre of a new world that would emerge from the bunker after the nuclear holocaust had passed over.

Folklore suggests Mr Polin wanted the property as a refuge and was keen to keep it as pristine as possible. So, despite the pre-existence of forest rights over his property, he played his part in keeping the property as intact as he possibly could.



Ruins of an old chimney at Recherche Bay

Photo: Richard Tuffin

Uncovering the past at our Recherche Bay reserve

Story by Richard Tuffin

Richard is an archaeologist who is completing a PhD at the University of Sydney, focussing on convict coal mining in Tasmania during 1822-1848. Richard's archaeological work complements the Reserve Management Plan objectives for Recherche Bay, developed by the TLC in 2007 in consultation with the community. A significant area of Recherche Bay's north-east peninsula is listed under state and national heritage registers. The management plan seeks to conserve and enhance sites or areas with significant natural and cultural values, and encourages education and interpretation of the site. Previously, archaeological studies looked at the French history of the area, with little research focused on convict settlements and activities. Richard's archaeological work provides insight into an important part of the history of Recherche Bay.

area raising coal, cutting timber and constructing infrastructure.

Though there are some historical records relating to the mines' operations, very little was known about the site itself. Previous surveys identified a number of features potentially related to the mining operation. Over a four day period in early 2013 I, along with my assistant, Lindsay Tuffin, carried out a detailed survey which identified a number of features relating to the convict occupation.

There were at least seven structures built during its settlement period constructed from stone and timber sourced from the immediate area. They would have been a mix of accommodation huts, stores and workshops, designed to house convicts and facilitate the working of the coal. The shaft itself was situated to the south of the main area of settlement, a horse-powered gin being used to raise and lower men and coal, as well as drain water into a nearby water race. Smaller trial shafts were located further north. Also surveyed were features relating to a late 19th century timber-getting operation, including a sawmill site, a brick chimney and a deep tramway cutting.

This archaeological fieldwork could not have been completed without the assistance of the TLC's Reserves Manager, Denna Kingdom, Lindsay Tuffin, Jason Whitehead and Fiona Taylor. It was aided by the Carlyle Greenwell Bequest, University of Sydney.

Recherche Bay, today known for its picturesque isolation, was once the site of a busy convict coal mining operation, situated on the east side of the bay, near the eponymously named Coal Pit Bight. The mines were occupied between 1840-1843 and were one of only five worked by convicts in Van Diemen's Land.

Somewhat remarkably, considering the tranquillity of the site today, Recherche was one of the larger and longest-lived of the operations. At its height, some 70 convicts worked in the



Remains of the Gowan Brae bunker
Photo: Matthew Newton



Photo: Chris Crerar

Great turnout for a great day out at the Blue Tier



Photo: Chris Crerar

Matt Taylor with his trusty microscope and young audience at the Blue Tier

Blue Tier field trip a blow-away day

A forecast of high winds and potential rain didn't dampen spirits or attendance at our Blue Tier supporter field trip on Saturday 27 February 2013.

Over 50 hardy adventurers travelled from across Tasmania and arrived early at Poimena car park, the site of an old tin mining village, to gather with our Blue Tier specialists; mycologists Dr Genevieve Gates and Dr David Ratkowski, ecologist Jane Keble-Williams and naturalists Kevin Bonham and Sarah Lloyd.

Many a hot cuppa was served to bolster us against the over-enthusiastic wind, but luckily the base tent was nestled in a thicket of myrtles to protect it and everyone within it. The majority of adults at the event headed off in teams for the enthusiasts walk up and around Mt Michael, but there were also quite a few small nature enthusiasts who headed off on their Goblin Forest walk with our very own 'big-kid' and conservation scientist, Matt Taylor, and

young nature photographer, eight year old Laura Ashby.

The common theme for both walks was the abundance of fungi, lichens, mosses, invertebrates (which were pointed out by our experts), gigantic ferns, myrtles and devil scats! Actually, the scats seemed to take centre stage at times, with groups eagerly circling round to examine and spot partly digested bones, teeth and fur.

After a day of traipsing and discovery out in the cold, it was a warm welcome for us all to spend the evening celebrating at the Weldborough Hotel, where Laura Ashby presented our CEO Jane Hutchinson with a donation of over \$700 from sales of her photographs. Thank you Laura and thank you everyone who came and made the day so enjoyable!

Blue Tier slide night and winter feast

If you couldn't make it to our Blue Tier field day, don't despair, because we're bringing the Blue Tier to you!

It will be a night of great company, delicious wintery fare and an opportunity to view the wonderful imagery from our Blue Tier field day, as well as a chance to thank everyone who helped secure our Blue Tier Reserve and contributed at the field day.

Pencil in Saturday 22 June from 5:30pm onwards at the Picnic Basket café in Taroona, Hobart because it's going to be a fabulous night!

Stay tuned for more information closer to the date or contact Phillip Roach at proach@tasland.org.au or 0438 826 606 for a chat.



Photo: Andy Townsend

Just a small glimpse of the fungi we got to see during the Blue Tier field trip

Stag beetle research

Story by Jane Keble-Williams

Jane is an ecologist and one of TLC's valued science volunteers. She has donated her time to work with the TLC Science & Planning Team to conduct research at our Blue Tier Reserve.

The iconic Simson's stag beetle (*Hoplogonus simsoni*), and its close relative Vanderschoor's stag beetle (*H. Vanderschoori*) are nationally endangered and only occur, in separate ranges, within a small area of Tasmania's north-east in the cool, wet forests around the Blue Tier plateau.

Adults live in the deep, moist leaf litter carpeting mature rainforest and wet eucalypt forest, while larvae live in the soil beneath the litter layer. This cool, moist microenvironment is essential for these stag beetle species' survival, and is found at the TLC's Blue Tier Reserve and West Pyengana property, which are close to the known ranges of Simson's and Vanderschoor's stag beetles, respectively.

The aim of the surveys has been to establish whether the stag beetles occur at the properties and to engage local landholders in this conservation research. At the volunteer weekend in February, and a further survey in April, we found Simson's stag beetle at the TLC Blue Tier Reserve and Vanderschoor's stag beetle at West Pyengana.

These results will establish a baseline for ongoing monitoring of these threatened beetles and guide management of the reserves. The data will be forwarded to the state government Natural Values Atlas, which informs the National Recovery Plan for each species.



Photo: Bill and Els Wakefield

A Tasmanian native hen strutting about, clearly very happy about the existence of the Naylor Bird Fund



Photo: Grant Dixon

Our Reserves Manager Denna Kingdom on her way to Gordonvale wishing she was already there; it's an arduous trip!

Back page briefs

The Naylor Bird Fund

Jo Naylor, fabulous TLC supporter and now retired staff member, has strengthened her commitment to bird conservation in Tasmania by establishing a personal fund in the TLC Foundation.

Thanks to the incredible generosity and confidence of generous donors like Jo, the TLC Foundation is well on its way to achieving financial sustainability to manage our TLC permanent reserves in perpetuity.

The TLC Science & Planning Team is delighted that Jo's support will boost the TLC's monitoring program through an increase in resources, such as sound recorders and other acoustic monitoring equipment.

"It is impossible to think of living in a world that does not have birds. I am passionate about protecting the fragile Tasmanian habitats that support our wonderful array of endemic species. That is why I have asked that the TLC direct income derived from my Foundation fund towards bird protection programs," Jo said.

Jo has also committed to leaving a bequest to the TLC as a further way to help us continue to protect Tasmania's bird habitat. Thank you Jo, for this wonderful gift.

If you would like further information

on the TLC Foundation or on how to leave a bequest, please call Clarissa on 0432 668 345 or email carndt@tasland.org.au

A note from our CEO Jane, about Gordonvale - we're almost there!

As the winter approaches we are getting ever closer to raising the funds we need to secure conservation protection for Gordonvale – the TLC's latest permanent reserve acquisition project.

It is a testament to this special place that there are so many fabulous stories associated with it, which have surfaced through our TLC supporters. These stories have obviously been the inspiration for many generous donations which will help us to secure the property and manage its conservation values in perpetuity.

A few people have asked me over the previous months what is so significant about Gordonvale, since it is already surrounded by the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, and what is the immediate threat? My answer is simple. It is because of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and its exceptional values that the protection of Gordonvale is so important.

In uninformed hands, development of this property (which is a possibility and an immediate threat) has the potential to compromise those World Heritage Area

values. My sincere thanks go to all of our fabulous supporters who have already donated towards our effort to protect this extraordinary World Heritage Area gem.

Interested in a bushland property?

We have a variety of important bushland properties for sale. What makes them important is that they're environmentally significant and we buy them because of their high conservation values. This is done through our Revolving Conservation Fund and all properties bought through this fund have a conservation covenant attached to their Titles, before becoming available for resale to caring new owners. It is fair to say that these places generally go to buyers who not only care about where they live, but what they leave behind.

The money generated through these sales then goes back into the fund, replenishing its reserves and enabling us to buy more properties with high conservation value, continuing the cycle of private land conservation. In this way the fund revolves in perpetuity.

We have selected every property primarily for its high ecological value, and most properties offer an existing home or a prime location for a home site. If you are interested and have the capacity to care for one of these special places please visit www.tasland.org.au/revolving to view what we currently have available.

We are grateful to the following organisations for their recent support:



The TLC uses **free software or programs** for its online event registrations and communications.