Wilderness wisdom from firm believer

By Ann Hunt

HOBART — The director of the Wilderness Society, Mr. Jonathan West, has resigned after a week before another hearing by the Tasmanian Parliament to decide the fate of Tasmanian forests.

Mr. West is expected to announce his resignation tonight before the High Court decides its case for the third time, and ensure his position will be left vacant for six to 12 months till a suitable replacement is found.

During those two months the battle for the State's forests will be won or lost.

It is believed Mr. West has resigned to leave important graduate studies in public administration at Harvard University.

He retired yesterday to continue his studies at Harvard, and an official announcement would be made today.

The interview director of the Wilderness Society, Mr. Stobart, who became the society during its successful Franklin Dam campaign, last night said he did not wish to comment on the directorship being taken over by Dr. Stobart.

He said he was not in an exciting sort of thing.

"I won't take up the position of director again, but I will be right there in the midst of things about five or six years from now when the Wilderness Society was in the fight," he said.

Dr. Stobart said there were ten members of the Board of Directors.

It was "quite likely" a Tasmanian would fill the vacancy.

"However, it is a long way off. We are trying to keep the Board of Directors as operational at its intact size," Dr. Stobart said.

It is believed a State Tasmanian candidate would be high profile. Mr. Stobart.
For the Forests

A history of the Tasmanian forest campaigns

Compiled and edited by
Helen Gee

Designed by Marie Robb
Published by The Wilderness Society
in Tasmania, Federal Minister for the Environment, Senator Graham Richardson, was in the audience. Premier Robin Goy, in a calculated political move, put the billrollers in to Jackery Marsh two weeks after they were listed on the interim list of the National Estate. At this point the situation was well and truly out of control. We were communicating both at a state level and the national level, we had lobbyists in the Minister's office; we had a national liaison officer in Canberra; we on side and understanding the issues, and at that point the Heritage Commission was on side as well. Everybody was really focused when they came in to Jackery Marsh which became the focus of national attention.

Rosemary: "I found myself acting as the media liaison person for the Lemnos celebration. I remember attending meetings up in Kalgoorlie with my baby daughter in an armchair. As soon as we got seated around the table, I remember her sitting in the middle of a stock of wilderness society pegs meeting at Jeff Winten's place at St Mary's. She was just holding away and I just lost it. We threatened to leave. This is not supposed to be a laughing matter. We lost our kids around, our campaigning became part of our family life in a positive way. By the time the second Jackery Marsh demonstration came up I was pregnant with my second child and a bureaucrat from the Australian Heritage Commission was staying with us for a fortnight looking at the values of the area. We had established a good relationship with a liaison officer in Canberra and the Director of the Wilderness Society at that time was a personal friend. We had very committed people within Jackery Marsh who were prepared to actively support our actions on the site, so basically the campaign was very successful because it resonated strongly on both these levels. We had the billrolling going in Canberra. The Wilderness Society acted as media liaison, putting out all our press releases and we had Wilderness Society people here in Jackery Marsh in droves.

For two weeks we sat a dawn meeting on a truck with a Wilderness Society Bill rolled in, picking up weight on the logging stick. Despite the fact that the Department had promised there would be no more logging in the National Parks Forests; we got sold out in Canberra, thanks to the efforts of Joan Ball. It started to look as if we were going to lose it again when political Bob Brown came in, and Joann West, then Director of Wilderness Society, and Bob said, 'That's only one thing they're going to give us, and that's everyone is in the valley gets arrested.' That's when the police got really hard, it's one thing and another to deal with these people. The police were super-aggressive and we got arrested and got in jail for the Greens. Two of them were working as doctors in town, some of them worked as hospital ward hospital warders, as transportable. The police were committed to winning. There were perhaps about 25 arrests, including me. We were in jail for two hours. That's one group that were going to a remote and another group that had never considered that they might have to take this kind of action. There were also people from overseas who were pretty sophisticated, who had taken part in anti-nuclear demonstrations.

Suen: "Bob Brown had done a pretty amazing job of being dropped onto the local community and saying in a non-threatening way 'Look, you're going to have to do this.' And I can remember going to a meeting and just saying 'Look, this is the only thing we're going to do.' And they said, 'OK, I'm never going to see anything like that again before, but I'm going to do this.'

Good feeling was generated; a whole community had empowered itself to act and we rang up the logging contractor and said, 'The whole valley, Andy, is going to be there and we're not going to move. We're going to have to be arrested.' The politicians rang up and contractor Andy Badger said to them, 'I don't want to go in there; I don't want to have anything to do with this.'

And the politicians said, 'You've got to go in there; we can't let these people get away with this.'

Suen: "So we were there all day and night and at one place the logging road to Wauaringa Slaughterfell I stayed with two others and did child care.

The recovery that came out of that action was some of the best we've ever seen. It was people being strong and committed. It was very peaceful, very positive. When
helsham: an analysis

Alistair Graham

My first visit to Tasmania was from New Zealand when I was working on the Antarctic minerals regime and the Tasmanian Government hosted one of the negotiating rounds. I was the NGO representative on the New Zealand delegation. That was in 1983, when the Gray Government had just announced the fast track legislation for the Electrona smelter.

Bob Barton was involved with the campaign. Subsequently he made an appointment to come and see me when I was Director of Fund for Animals at Manly in Sydney. He knew I'd had lots of forestry experience in New Zealand and he literally asked me if I'd come down. I just said, 'Yes,' having in mind that Tasmania would be a nice place to be and to live.

With an Honours Degree in Agricultural Forest Sciences from Oxford in the early 1970s, I absorbed the intellectual stuff about forests and forestry very quickly because I was thrown into the Helsham Inquiry. It took me a lot longer to get into the sociology and politics of Tasmania and the conservation movement. My first inklings of what was ahead for me came from the grapevine.

Not only was I going to organise things in the Helsham Inquiry but I was the designated replacement for Jonathan West. People in Sydney said, 'Do you realise what you're letting yourself in for?' I had no idea what I was letting myself in for! I had only the dimmest perceptions that The Wilderness Society existed at this stage.

I came down in August 1987. I remember it was bitterly, bitterly cold, I had a couple of meetings with Jonathan and also the President of ALC at the time, Hal Woodman. Getting the evidence together for the Helsham Inquiry was mainly the work of Hal, although the political work to create the opportunity was the significant contribution of Jonathan West. It was through Hal that we got John Barton in - a bright, young barrister out of Sydney who organised things and was willing to put the emphasis in the right place.

The conservation movement got Commonwealth funding and my job was to organise the spending of that money. The issue between Jonathan West, Joan Staples and Craig Emerson was enormously powerful. You make your own luck. You work with the opposition you have. Jonathan was known and trusted within Labor party circles. I couldn't do those sort of things. My energy went into networking the movement as a whole, so that when we wanted help the movement responded.

The two key people who did most of the bread and butter work were Sean Cadman and Grant Dixon. In terms of the case for World Heritage, we divided up the work. Sean had the job of getting the scientists together who could say things about the biological and cultural characteristics of the area. Grant did the geological characteristics. They made the contacts with the scientists and worked with them, organising their appearances, working with John Barton on the proof of evidence and understanding, so we could cross examine them to bring out the crucial points. It was a team of four who were the core of the input. It was a great team, it worked superbly well and Grant and Sean were fantastic in terms of turning information and ideas into logical, ruthless, cold legal presentation of information.

We all learnt a lot about World Heritage values. It was very good for our morale to find the overwhelming majority of academics around the country who knew anything about Western Tasmania were all enormously supportive and went out of their way to find evidence and to give evidence. Geoff Law has, over the years done a superb job of extracting that information.

Why, despite the overwhelming weight of evidence, did the decision go the way it did?
Jonathan West, then director of TWS, asked me to come in and help: we really needed a flag-waving campaign and this was to be the incoming of Michael Hodgman MHR in the Division electorate. The badges, beautifully designed by a well-known graphic designer, were dispatched throughout the community: 'I paid $1 to get rid of Michael Hodgman'. We couldn't keep up the supply! The badge became the focus of the campaign to the extent that Hodgman was responding to it. We had a really good display down at Salamanca Market, in Sandy Bay and in North Hobart. We backed down to Kent, the Labor candidate; and this was a typical federal election, a two-horse race. We were successful. Minutes after the election results appeared [on] the morning from Melbourne: 'Well done! The biggest swing in the country in Division.' When you start doing things well, there's a lot of support, a lot of good feeling. We had our own election signs, our own badges, the badges, an election meeting in the Town Hall, stalls at Salamanca market... and we came up with a good slogan: 'The Forests Can't Vote But You Can - whatever you do, don't vote Liberal!'

The last time I did before I left TWS in 1988 was to initiate The Great Tassie Forest Walk, which I really intended to go on and organise. We had a brainstorming session that lasted about a week. The big question was, How can we focus on the forests without having a blockade in the summer? I put some weeks of groundwork into just what we could do. We came up with a number of events, some really good ideas. The way to start things happening is to take people out of the campaign office, down to the pub or just in an empty room. The Great Walk was a fantastic success.

an activist’s dilemma

Leaving TWS was a very painful decision, in a way. At that time, late 1988, there was no money in the organisation. I couldn't see my way through needing to earn some money and at the same time I felt very strongly connected to the organisation. I had to stop myself, I was not making a financial decision. I came to accept that I could only contribute short, sharp bursts. I had a household to run and had to accept my circumstances. Of course I returned from time to time for specific projects and more recently, in 1999 and into 2001, organised the successful forest tours of the Styx Forest. A total of 64 tours have introduced 1450 people to this unique forest.

Once an activist, always an activist.
I spent my early life in Adelaide but as I had relatives in Tasmania I was always visiting the Island. What really got me involved in the forest campaigns was a walk up Wy Lola Creek. Looking south I saw the magnificence of the South-West and then the contrast with the totally devastated Florentine Valley. It was like a cancer eating away into the South-West. That was in December 1984.

In Adelaide I had been involved in submissions writing on the Woodchip Bills in 1985. It was in the context that this was the first of a series of woodchip decisions that would affect areas all around Australia. It was important to reach members of Parliament who had no forest in their electorate, no forestry issues, to create the federal context. I had a few weeks to fill in before the exams, but it kept on being delayed. We wrote to the politicians, visited them or their staff, using maps, explaining how we wanted National Estate areas protected. Some we saw two or three times. At the same time we were writing newspaper articles and putting together displays for shopping centres. We were quite active in the last half of 1985.

South Australian members of the Wilderness Society had a reputation for doing this ground work. Not much had been done in identification of wilderness areas in South Australia. However many members walked in Tasmania in the summer, had been involved in the Franklin Blockade and supported conservation in Tasmania. They were prepared to do the work for the areas adjacent to where they went bushwalking.

Joan Staples was doing a lot of work in Canberra at this time and Dave Heathcrot spent a lot of time up there, working with Jean. That was when Jonathan West was in the Federal Minister for the Environment, Barry Cohen's, office.

In December 1985 I finished a walk in Tasmania and they still hadn't made the woodchip decision so I thought I'd pop into Darcy Street, The Wilderness Society's office. I had some spare time. I was there till February 1986.

The plans came out to extend the road south of Farmhouse Creek. I had helped prepare briefing papers for the media on both Farmhouse Creek and the Lemonthyme and sent them to politicians. In Adelaide I did a lot of lobbying and wrote to politicians regularly, going to see as many as I could.

What surprised me, coming to Tasmania, was that people didn't talk to the politicians. The dialogue went on through the media. It's terribly important to make the politicians aware that there are people in their electorates concerned about these issues.

In Adelaide, The Wilderness Society only employed four shop staff and everything else was done by a committee after hours. We hired someone to take on the forest campaign after I left to come down here to Tasmania. The Committee members, who all had full time jobs, couldn't keep abreast of the political developments and the media. Conversely the employed coordinator would find difficulty getting press releases cleared by the committee, a situation creating tension. The interface between the activists and those with the greater authority is a perennial problem in many organisations.

After Farmhouse Creek, The Wilderness Society in Hobart got very active but also motivated people in the south-east of the mainland through the supply of information and more pressure on The Feds. The mainland support triggered major advances in Tasmania in 1986. It was the impending Helsby Inquiry that led Jonathan West at the end of 1985 to suggest I should spend more time in Tasmania.

It was important that people were active in Hobart and also on the mainland. It's very hard to run a good campaign on the mainland if there's not good local support in Tasmania providing information and photographs. On the other hand, it's not good enough to have a campaign in Tasmania alone. Where the Federal Government is involved there needs to be action on the mainland to persuade the Federal Government it's a serious issue.

Early in 1987, when we were expecting the railway to resume south of Farmhouse Creek, we organized for people to go down there with radios and keep an eye on what was going on.

We broke the story on logging in the Lemonthyme on Christmas Day in 1986 and Barry Cohen, Minister for the Environment, said he'd have it looked up in twenty-four hours. Of course it wasn't. Although an inquiry had been promised before Christmas, there was a lot of pressure to make sure these areas were protected before and during the inquiry.

The legislation wasn't passed until April 1987; there was a summer of break-in protest in the Southern Forests as well as in the Lemonthyme. There was a Federal election called in June and held in July. The inquiry didn't get seriously under way until after the election. It proceeded in two stages; first it looked at world heritage values and then the other requirement was to look into alternative forest resources. That second stage started at the end of October and ran through until early January 1988.

I remember going on flights over the Southern Forests after the Helsby Inquiry was set up. We talked to Hal Westmore, the President of ACE, about the Inquiry because...