

THE LAND OF OZ

Images from Eastern Australia

Photographs and Text by J Michael Pearce



THE LAND OF OZ offers a brief photographic journey in search of some of the phenomenal biological and geological treasures that lie behind the so-called Wallace Line, an evolutionary boundary theorized by the 19th century naturalist, Alfred R. Wallace. On a voyage through the East Indies, he noticed a shift occurring somewhere among the island chains of Indonesia that appeared to separate the placental mammals in Asia from the pouched marsupials in Australasia.

Australia's tectonic plate journey has isolated the continent from the rest of the planet. Along with Tasmania, it was the last great land mass to abandon Antarctica during the breakup of the original Gondwana, 180 million years ago.

At first glance eastern Australia can seem quite familiar, but when you look again, this land of Oz is a very different kind of place.



T H E G R E A T O C E A N R O A D

The Great Ocean Road winds majestically along the southern coast of Victoria from Marengo through the Great Otway National Park to the famous 12 Apostles in Port Campbell National Park. Built by surviving war veterans as a memorial to their comrades killed in World War I, the Great Ocean Road is one of the most extensive war memorials ever built anywhere in the world.

From world class surfing beaches to beautiful national parks, this breathtaking highway follows the Pacific Ocean around mountains, through valleys and along steep coastal bluffs.

G R E A T O T W A Y N A T I O N A L P A R K

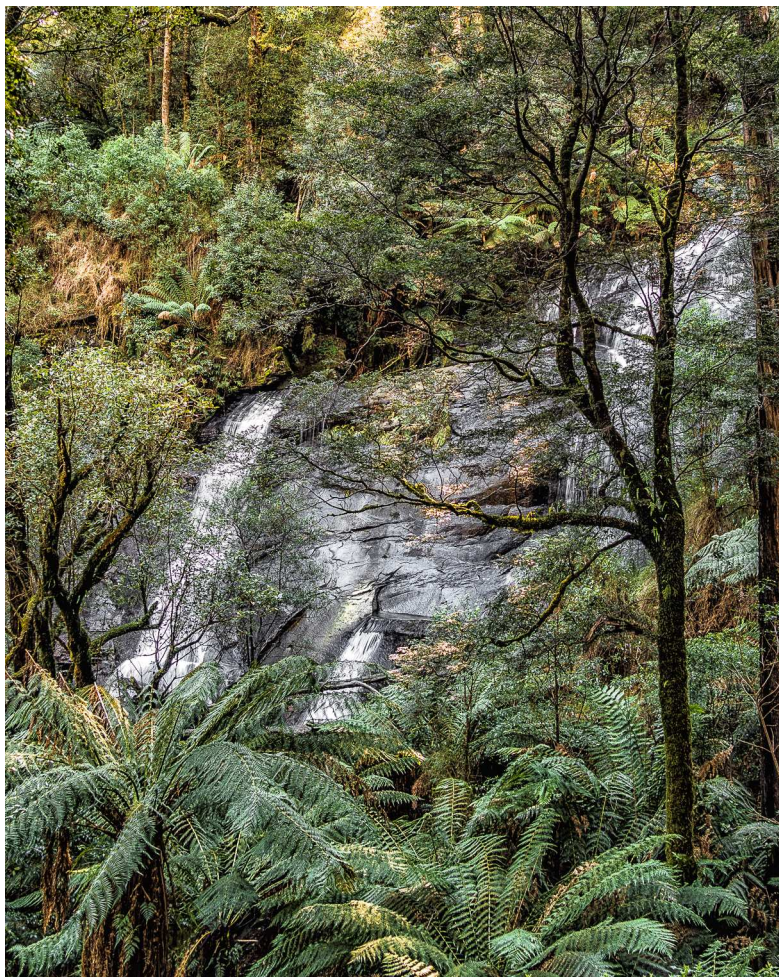
Standing like a sentinel at 1100 feet above sea level, the Soft Tree Fern (*dicksonia antarctica*) grows on moist slopes and gullies in the cool temperate rainforest of the Otway Range in the Great Otway National Park. The Soft Tree Fern can reach heights of 17 meters (50 feet), but tends to grow very slowly (one meter per 20 years). The fronds spread to a diameter often equal to the height of the fern. The tree ferns in these photographs stand a mere 6-7 meters high (the more common height) and are scattered among the majestic old growth Mountain Ash trees (*eucalyptus regnant*) that dot the hillsides adjacent to Triplet Falls.

Though limited to small areas today, the cool temperate rainforest covered much of southern Australia and Tasmania before the Jurassic break up of Gondwana.



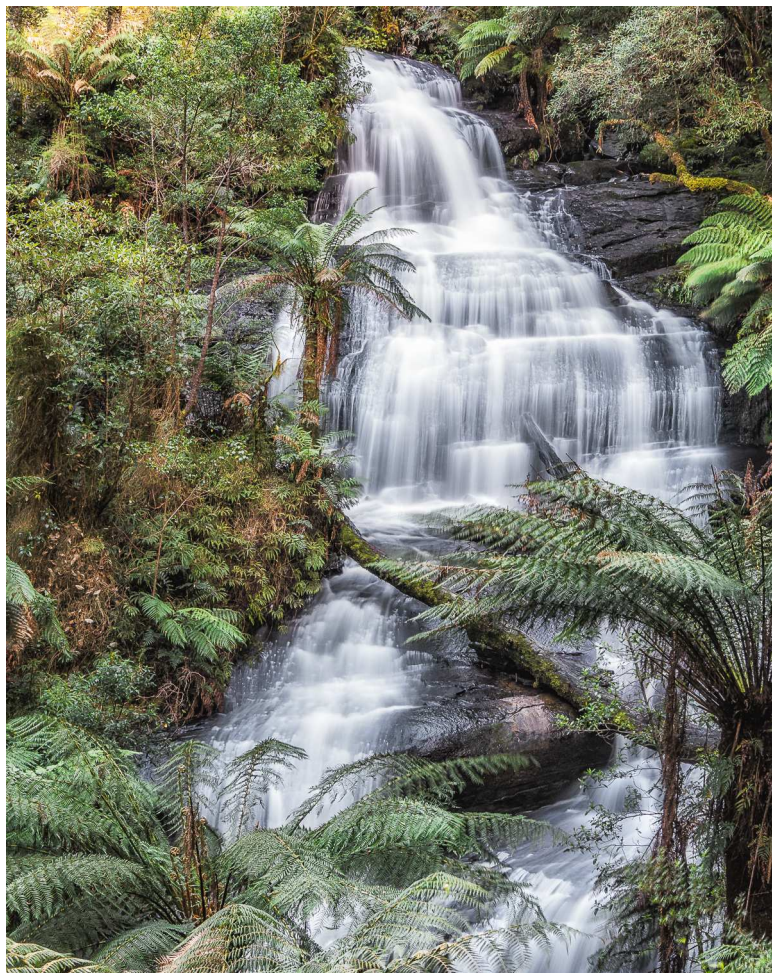


Soft Tree Ferns, Triplet Falls Boardwalk, Great Otway National Park, Wyelangta, Victoria



Triplet Falls, Great Otway National Park,
Wyalangta, Victoria

Triplet Falls goes from a whimper to a roar depending on the seasonal rainfall.



PORT CAMPBELL NATIONAL PARK



The 12 Apostles, Port Campbell National Park, Victoria

The remnant rock pile seen in the foreground is all that remains of a former Apostle that collapsed on July 3, 2005. Glancing around in all directions searching for missing Apostles, an affable visitor from Queensland remarked, "My wife and I came 2000 kilometers to see the 12 Disciples, mate".



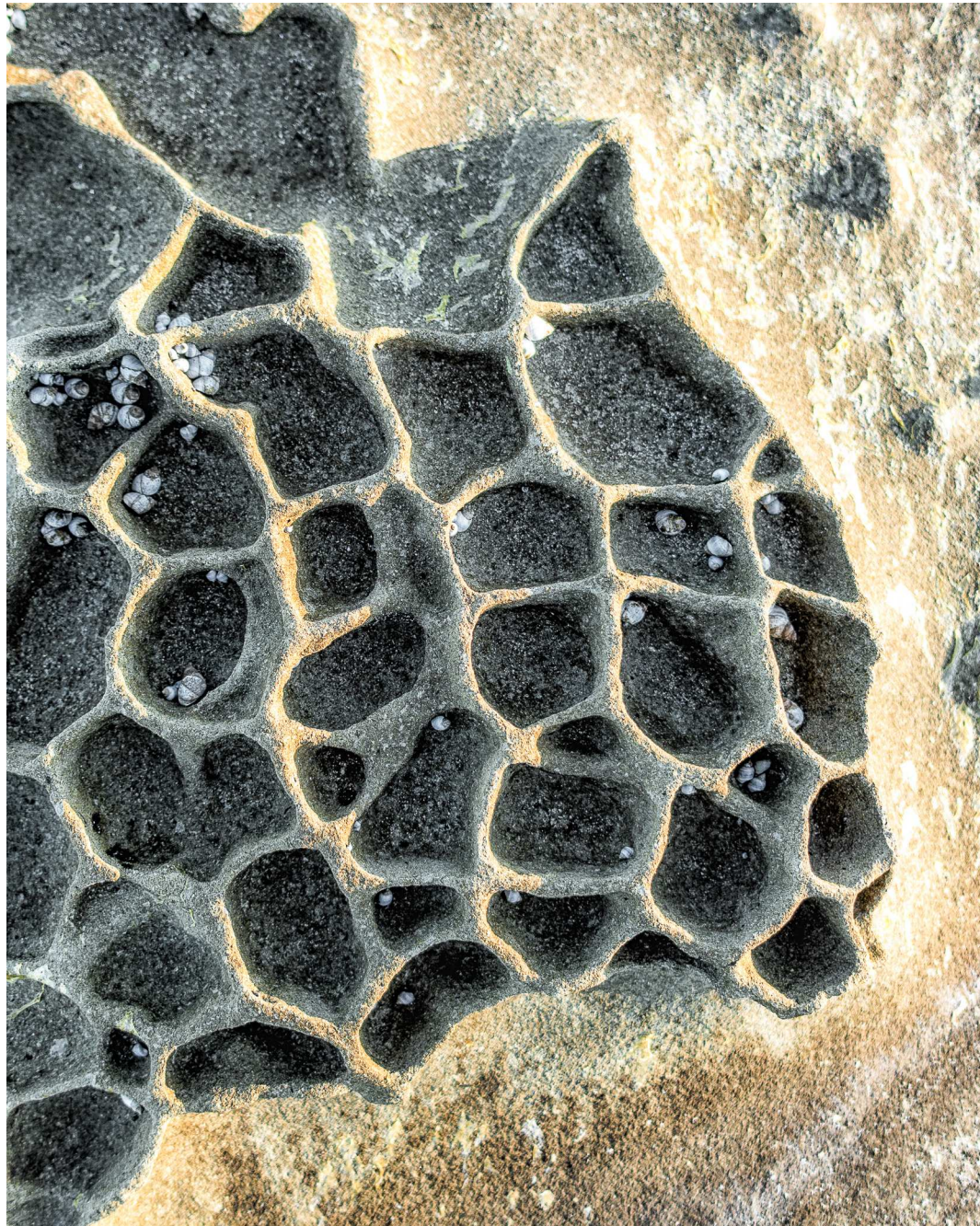
The Grotto, Port Campbell National Park, Victoria

M A R E N G O B E A C H



The Eumeralla Sandstone at Marengo Beach was formed during the Cretaceous geologic period from consolidated sediment and volcanic ash. Now years of wind and wave action have carved out dramatic erosion patterns. The photographs on the following pages show some of the striking detail of this unique sandstone.





Eumeralla Sandstone detail, Marengo Beach, Victoria



Eumeralla Sandstone detail, Marengo Beach, Victoria



Eumeralla Sandstone detail, Marengo Beach, Victoria



Eumeralla Sandstone detail,
Marengo Beach, Victoria





Eumeralla Sandstone detail, Marengo Beach, Victoria



Tidal algae,
Marengo Beach, Victoria





Eumeralla Sandstone detail, Marengo Beach, Victoria



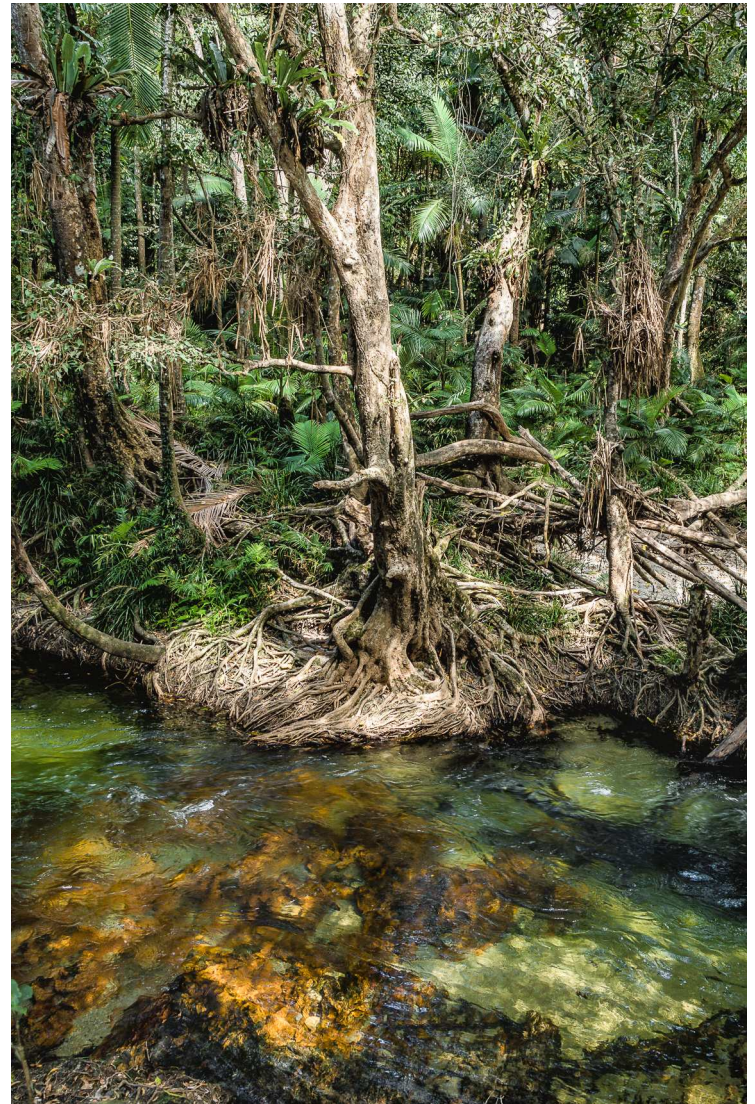
An avian dinosaur track was discovered in the Eumeralla Sandstone at Dinosaur Cove a few kilometers west of Morengo. (Courtesy Paleocast.com)

DAINTREE
NATIONAL PARK



To reach the Daintree National Park from Port Douglas, you have to cross the crocodile infested Daintree River on a ferry boat secured to a cable. One evening on our return south from the park, the attendant mentioned offhandedly to look upstream at the three meter croc, “lying by the boat, mate”. We looked and there it was, quietly cruising 20 feet off the side of the boat. It is a bit unnerving to watch these ancient “salties” lurk patiently beneath the water’s surface waiting to lunge at unsuspecting prey. Though armed with formidable teeth and jaws, the saltwater crocodile is not well adapted to chewing, so it often captures and drowns its prey, stashing the victim in riverbank debris to marinate for a future meal or to become bait for an unlucky scavenger. Mature crocs will attack anything, from crustaceans to cattle (humans notwithstanding). Younger crocs are a particularly favorite meal. Locals advise not to get too attached to any particular crocodile before they reach 6 years old.

The Daintree rainforest is also home to the cassowary, an emu sized flightless bird (see pg 41) with a particularly dangerous third claw that can do serious damage to anyone the bird deems a threat. The cassowary actually subsists mainly on fruit.



Mossman River Gorge, Daintree National Park,
Queensland

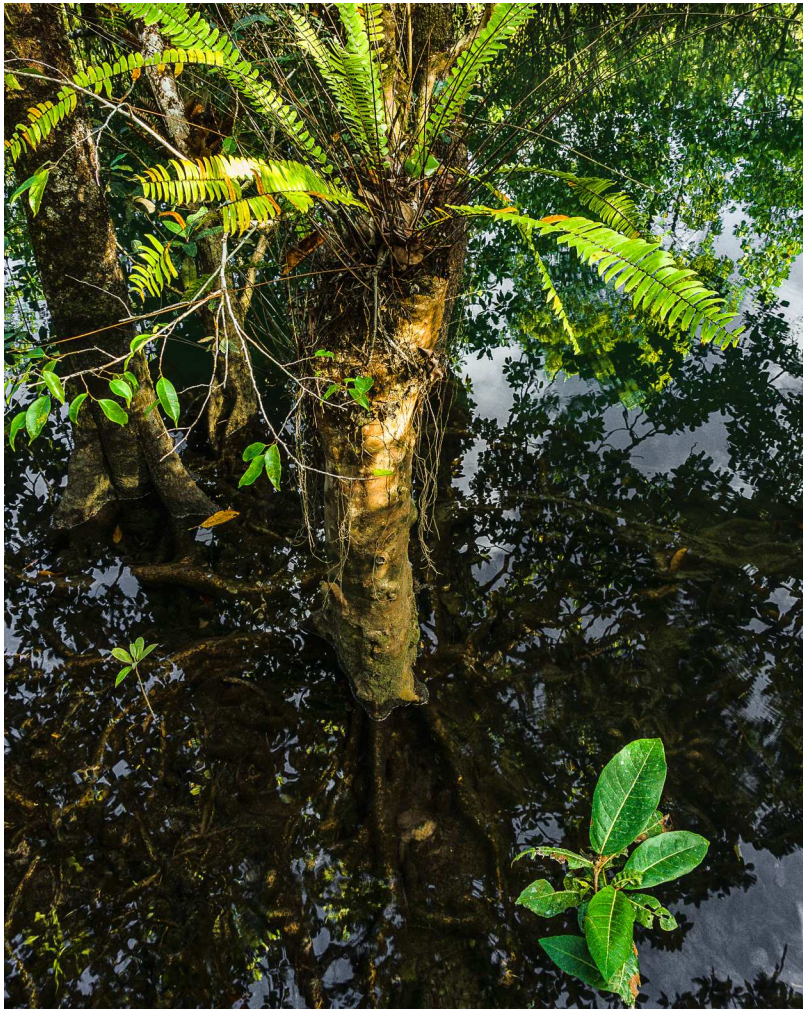


Submerged Fan Palm frond, Dubuji Boardwalk, Daintree National Park, Queensland



Dubuji Boardwalk, Daintree
National Park, Queensland





Tree fern, Dubuji Boardwalk, Daintree National Park,
Queensland



Theory goes that the dramatic buttress roots of some tropical trees are an adaptation to increase the surface area, enhancing the respiration of the tree since the roots are often completely submerged. Other theories such as stability or nutrient uptake could also play a part in this elegant design.



Mardja Boardwalk,
Daintree National Park, Queensland

Most trees in the rainforest flower at the crown of the tree in the canopy. Birds are their main pollinators. Some trees, however, flower on their trunks. This phenomenon is called *cauliflory*, and it attracts forest floor mammals such as pygmy possums, small birds that live below the canopy, and insects such as wasps and moths, to do their pollinating. Early botanists thought these flowers and fruit were just parasites, but not so. The Bumpy Satinash tree (*Syzygium cormiflorum*) is one of these mysterious trees. The blooms and fruit cover the entire length of the trunk of the tree. They grow throughout the rainforest, and the flowers emerge through rough bumpy portions of the bark, thus the name "Bumpy". The tree appears to have a special relationship with a particular black ant (*Iridomyrmex gilberti*) that lives inside these bumps and helps the flowers and fruit sprout. Some Satinash trees flower and fruit only on the branches and some, as in these photographs, do so only on the trunks. We were lucky to arrive during the peak flowering period in September which happens only once every three to five years. The cassowary often eats the Satinash fruit at ground level.



Bumpy Satinash flowers and fruit, Marrdja Boardwalk,
Daintree National Park, Queensland



Bumpy Satinash flowers and fruit, Marrdja Boardwalk, Daintree National Park, Queensland



T A S M A N I A

H O B A R T



For the first 50 years or so of the modern colonial history of Van Diemen's Land, as it was known back then, Tasmania, like other parts of Australia, served as a British Empire penitentiary. During this period, residents were mostly convicts brought over from Great Britain in ships that had once been used for slave trade. Wars fought and horrifically lost by the indigenous peoples against the British later influenced H. G. Wells to mention the Tasmanian "Black War" in "The War of the Worlds". Convict importation ended in 1853, but the advent of prosperity that helped modernize mainland Australia only sporadically emerged in Tasmania. Like many remote places, the state struggled with a culture of corruption and cronyism. Isolated by the Tasmanian sea and lacking any industry to speak of, the abundant forests of Tasmania were its greatest resource, yet even these woodlands were often ravaged by scandalous entrepreneurs and government officials.

Modern Tasmania may be the poorest state in Australia, but emerging ecotourism businesses promise to sustain its economy and preserve her natural resources. The rugged beauty and isolated wonders of Tasmania are rapidly being discovered by a new generation, and it will be up to these young explorers to watch over and protect this unique and remarkable island.



M o u n t W e l l i n g t o n u n d e r a v e i l o f r a i n a n d r a i n b o w

M O N A

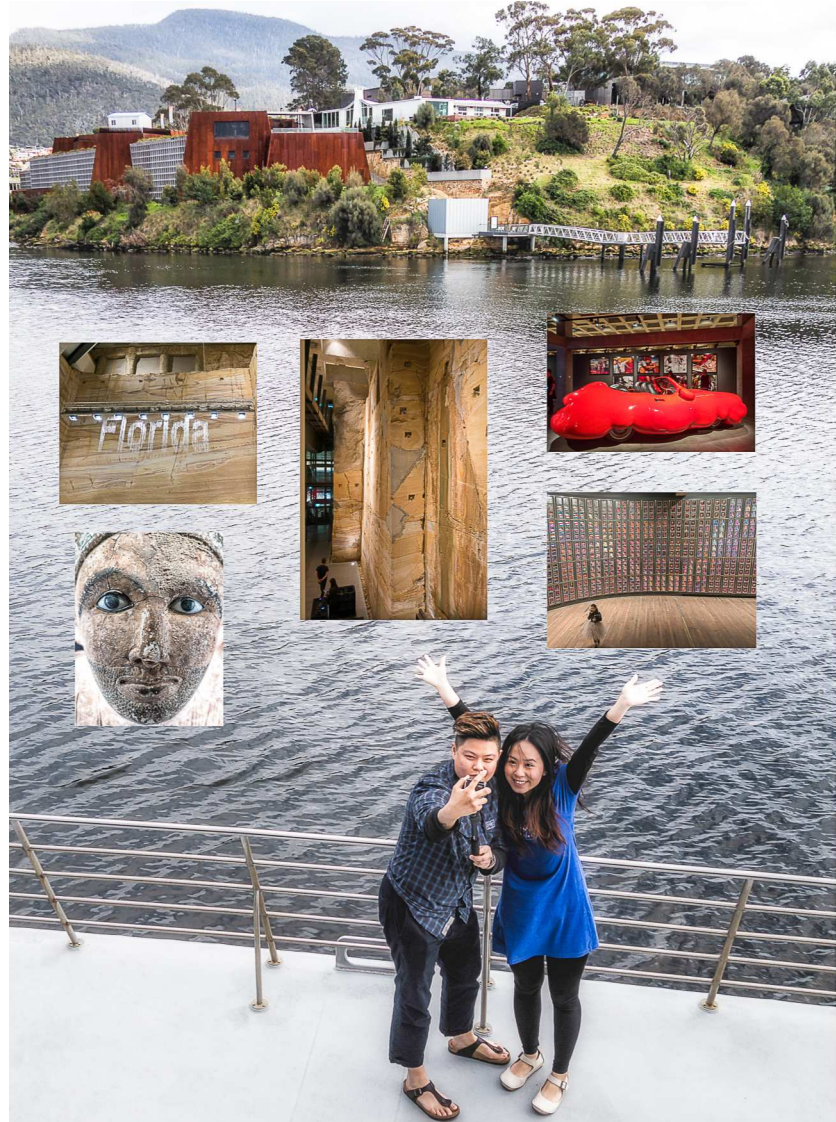
Four miles north of Hobart is a most unexpected Tasmanian attraction. The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) opened in January, 2011, and though welcomed by some as a unique addition to the city's art scene, it was also derided due to its obvious fascination with sex and death. MONA is the personal vision of David Walsh, who made his fortune with a gambling syndicate known as "The Bank Roll" (his specialty was thoroughbred racing) and then invested a great deal of it in the museum.

As viewed from the ferry on the Derwent River, you can only see the fortress-like structure of the surface facade. Most of the museum is actually hollowed out deep under ground.

Descending into a Triassic sandstone labyrinth, we find an eccentric collection of artwork such as a puffy red Porsche, a waterfall where well-lit water drops form words, a mummy from Egypt, and a rainbow snake comprised of panels of flowers, birds, and faces. David Walsh has described MONA as "a secular temple and a subversive adult Disneyland".

Despite MONA's strange reputation, Hobartians like that it has put their town on the map. They also appear to like David Walsh, which may not be such a surprise, as Tasmania, though often described as being a conservative state, is in fact home to one of the earliest Green Parties founded anywhere in the world.

The guidebook "Lonely Planet" listed Hobart in 2013 as one of the top ten cities in the world to visit, probably largely due to MONA.



BRUNY ISLAND



Sand bridge between north and south Bruny Island, Tasmania

Every evening in the Australian winter, little penguins (*eudyptula minor*, also called fairy penguins: see pg 41) form a nightly “parade” returning to their nesting burrows in the dunes after a day spent foraging at sea. The dawn reverses the parade, as they head back out to sea.



Adventure Bay, Bruny Island, Tasmania

FREYCINET NATIONAL PARK



View across Coles Bay toward the Freycinet Peninsula, Tasmania



Great Oyster Bay, Tasmania

BAY OF FIRES



Whites sands, clear waters, and wild outcoppings, Bay of Fires, Tasmania

The name Bay of Fires (aboriginal name Larapuna) actually originates from the aboriginal camp fires seen by Tobias Furneaux, the first western captain to explore the region. Yet you could imagine the name just as easily coming from the bright color of the red lichens growing on the granitic surface.



Bay of Fires, Tasmania



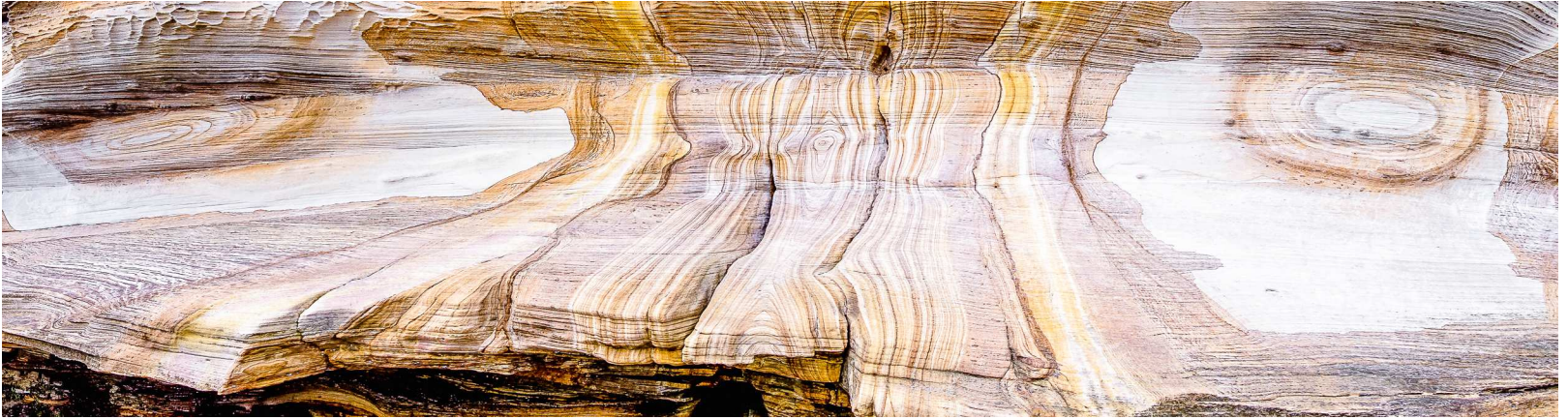
Red lichens and granitic fracturing, Bay of Fires, Tasmania

MARIA ISLAND NATIONAL PARK



Named by the explorer, Abel Tasman, Maria Island (pronounced Ma-rye-ya) lies 4 miles off the east coast of Tasmania. Steeped in gulag history, the island is now a National Park, and because of its isolation is home to a medley of transplanted Forester Kangaroos, Wombats, and other marsupials including an illusive breeding pair of Tasmanian devils (see pg 41). The famous “Taz” of Looney Tunes fame suffers from devil facial tumor disease, a highly contagious and fatal parasitic cancer that is on the verge of decimating the wild population, demanding emergency maneuvers to try and save the species. Tasmanian devils have also been relocated as far away as the Albuquerque BioPark in New Mexico and the Wild Animal park in San Diego, while scientists desperately seek a cure for the disease.

First occupied by aboriginals and then by early sealers and whalers, the island became a penal colony between 1825 and 1851, leaving the historical structures in and around the town of Darlington as evidence of those dark times. In 1884, an Italian silk merchant named Diego Bernacchi leased the entire island hoping to turn Maria Island into a Mediterranean vineyard retreat complete with hotel and coffee palace. As with many dream ventures, this one came up short and was abandoned in 1895. Not easily dissuaded, Diego returned in 1920 to export cement from the island for the next ten years, before that too failed. In 1972, Maria Island became a National Park and is now on the bucket list of many Australians and international outdoor enthusiasts.



Painted Cliffs, Maria Island, Tasmania

The fanciful colorations in the cliff walls are a result of iron oxide leaching from the vertical fractures in the sandstone.





Calla Lilies, Darlington townsite, Maria Island, Tasmania

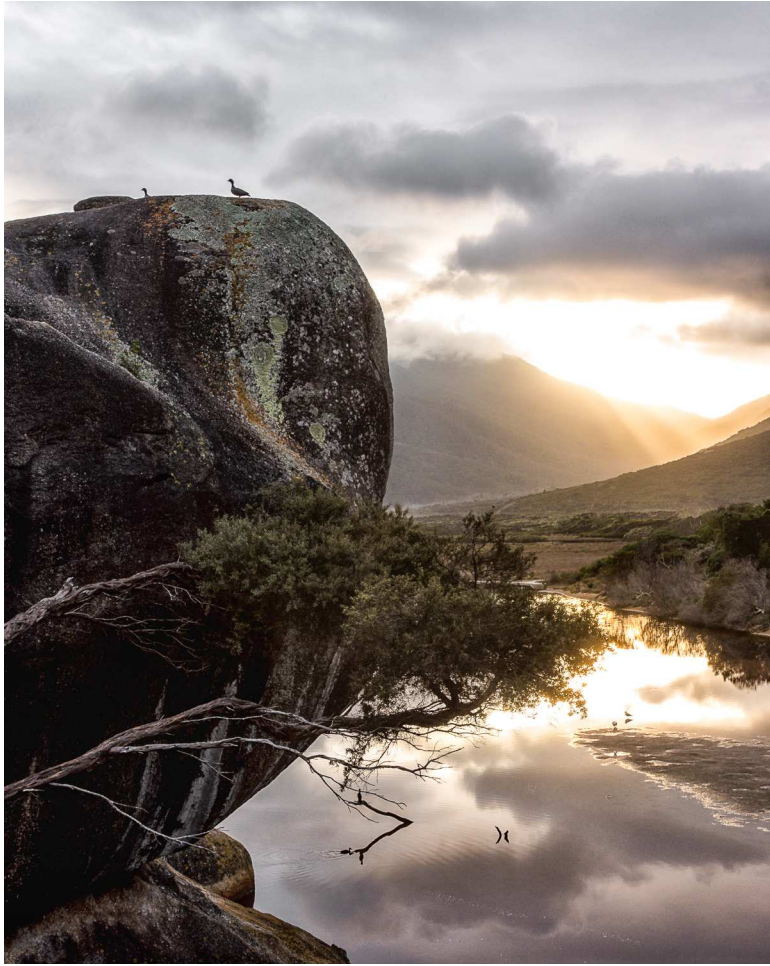
W I L S O N P R O M O N T O R Y
N A T I O N A L P A R K , V I C T O R I A



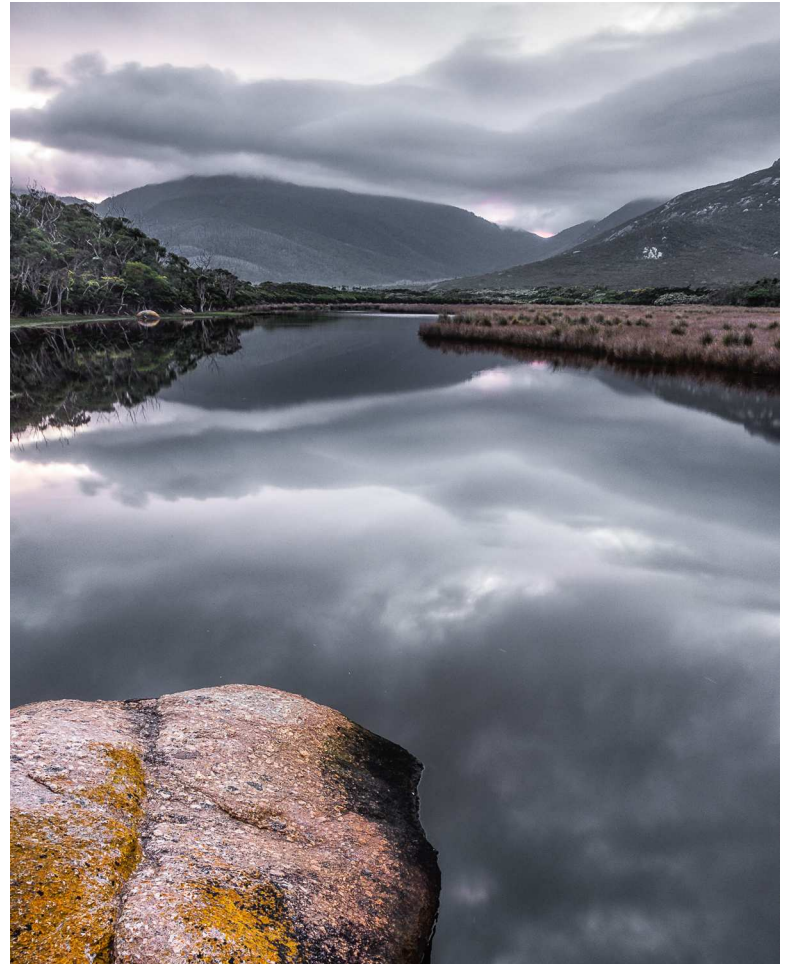
Tidal River Estuary, Wilson Promontory, Victoria



Tidal River Estuary, Wilson Promontory, Victoria

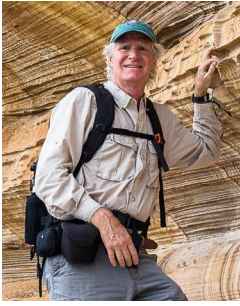


Tidal River Estuary,
Wilson Promontory, Victoria





Mike & Maya



Author/Photographer



Wallaby



Wombat



Koala



Kookaburra



Echidna



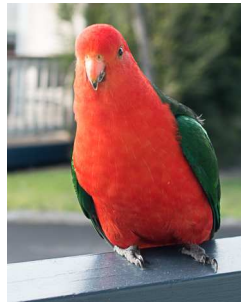
Cassowary



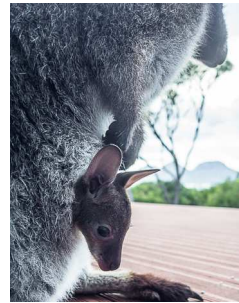
Little Penguin



Spoonbill



King Parrot



Wallaby Joey



Water Dragon



Tawny Frogmouth



Flying Fox



Tasmanian Devil



Gena



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Sincere thanks go to my partner in travel and editing, Maya Page, and to our hosts in Oz,
Dan, Louisa, and Gena.

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(Web design by Page St Clair)



Designed using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom



In September, 2014, my wife, Maya, and I took the plunge down under to the Land of Oz, known by some folks as Australia. With the generous hospitality of our nephew, Dan, his wife, Louisa, and daughter, Gena, and following their guidance, we drove over the Great Ocean Road and later joined them at Wilson's Promontory. Maya and I travelled north to Port Douglas (climate similar to Belize) to examine the tropical rainforests of the Daintree National Park, then south to Tasmania (climate similar to the Pacific Northwest) to explore its idyllic east coast.