

# **WILDERNESS KARST IN TASMANIAN RESOURCE POLITICS**

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Until the early 1970s karst resources were largely unrecognised in decisions regarding land-use in Tasmania. Over the past decade growing concern for the protection of the wilderness landscape of the island's south-west has stimulated the growth both of community based environmental interest groups and of protective agencies within the administrative machinery of government. Both have attracted individuals with expertise in karst and a personal commitment to its proper management. Largely through their awareness and individual efforts, caves and karst have been promoted as little-known but worthwhile components of the wilderness.

The positive results of this have included a stimulus to our knowledge of karst, an increase in public awareness of karst and a strengthening of the case for the prevention of the wilderness area. On the negative side, there may be some potentially dysfunctional consequences attached to the politicising of karst, including the loss of any "first strike" advantage which might otherwise have been available to karst advocates dealing with areas where it is a primary rather than subsidiary resource; and also the development in some sectors of the community of an "anti-cave" ethos which might otherwise not yet have arisen.

## INTRODUCTION

The object of this paper is to trace the nature of and changes in the management status over the past decade of one small component of the Tasmanian environment : karst. In particular, I wish to pursue the question of how the management of limestone areas and the conservation of caves has become intertwined with, and impinged upon by broader questions of land use priorities and Tasmanian politics; to examine also the tactics adopted by various parties, and to consider some of the implications for the karst areas. To do this I will need to traverse considerable ground which may not at first glance appear to be related to caves per se, but I hope to demonstrate that cave conservation problems can be neither understood nor resolved without taking account of the wider environment.

This paper represents a form of case study, but one which emanates not from an entirely dispassionate observer but from a participant in the processes described. It must therefore suffer both the shortcomings and strengths inherent in that perspective - hopefully by stating areas of my personal involvement attention will be drawn to specific areas for scrutiny in this regard. To introduce the paper I wish firstly to review by example the pattern of land-use decision-making in Tasmania and then the status of karst at the time the congress of this Federation last met in Tasmania in 1970, before reviewing structural changes, public issues and advocacy which have impinged upon the situation since that time.

## PATTERN OF LAND-USE DECISION-MAKING IN TASMANIA

The most effective method for describing the social and political milieu and the relevant processes operating within it in Tasmania is to review briefly the first major conservation issue in the state, which reached its crescendo in the early 1970s. In 1955 submissions from bushwalkers and private pilots led to the creation of a 2400ha scenic reserve known as the Lake Pedder National Park. In 1962 geologists and engineers began to examine the general area with an eye to the development of its hydro-electric potential. Disquiet among the small group who knew Lake Pedder led to the formation later that year of the South West Committee (SWC), a federation of interested organisations which requested the Tasmanian government to protect the entire South-West as a fauna reserve.

In 1964 the state government established instead an interdepartmental committee (IDC) which included representatives from various government agencies, and on 21 December 1966 the IDC was briefed to consider future development of the South-West. The SWC was refused membership and so produced its own plan for a major national park. On 21 June 1965 Premier Eric Reece quietly acknowledged that there was to be "some modification to the Lake Pedder National Park" (Mercury 21 June 1965). On 13 April 1966 a South West Fauna District of 646 000ha was gazetted, but within two months its future seemed questionable when a case for special financial aid for a hydro-electric project on the Middle Gordon River was submitted by the state to the federal government. On 29 March 1967 continuing disquiet as to the still unspecified threat to Lake Pedder resulted in formation of the more activist Save Lake Pedder National Park Committee (SLPNPC). In 1967 the IDC predictably supported proposed power development, but also recommended an extended national park. Yet it was not until 25 May 1965 that the proposal of the Hydro-Electric Commission (HEC) was finally tabled in parliament (McKenry 1972). It provoked an immediate public response. Reece's "some modification" meant total inundation and obliteration. Millions of dollars had already been spent. Conservationists were shadow boxing with something bordering on a 'fait accompli'.

To this point we can recognise the foundations of a number of important elements in the decision processes which persist today. Firstly there is an unwillingness to upset planning procedures and risk any challenge to professional values by disclosing information in a threatening social environment. More than a decade elapsed between initial investigations and the first public release of information. Secondly, there is a resentment by the old institutions and power elites of the state when subjected to any questioning: at one stage Premier Reece accused the SWC, a public body, of "meddling in public affairs". Put more bluntly, a classic strategem of obfuscation, distortion, misinformation, secrecy and half truth was developed which set a pattern for future public resource decisions affecting the Tasmanian wilderness. A further problem lay in the fact that little was known of the area in question, for while resistance to flooding Lake Pedder was

immediate, the Gordon gorge area and to a degree also the remarkable Serpentine River were surrendered without resistance, and it was to be some years before it was realised by cavers that karst had also been destroyed. (Kiernan 1981a) Secrecy gained the HEC a critical delay to the mobilisation of contrary public opinion, by which time the scheme had gained considerable momentum.

A record petition of 10,000 signatures was presented to the state House of Assembly (lower house) during the ensuing debate, to which the Legislative Council (upper house) responded by establishing, on 14 June 1967, a select committee of enquiry. Neither the HEC nor the state government saw fit to await its findings, for by the end of June legislation had been introduced to the lower house to authorise the project and give the HEC total control over the entire South-West Fauna District. Here lies the foundations of the more recent control of parts of the Gordon-Franklin area by the HEC. Premier Reece was so justifiably confident that the Bill would pass without amendment that he skipped the last day of the debate to secure special bridging finance of \$47 million from the Loan Council in Canberra, even though the proposal had not been passed by the state legislature. On 22 August 1967 the select committee reported in favour of the dams, but urged also that an extended national park be proclaimed. The first finding was endorsed enthusiastically but the latter was never fully complied with. Among other recommendations was that all future proposals be scrutinised by parliamentary select committee, but this too was ignored some years later when the Pieman River project was approved, and a shell-shocked conservation movement put up negligible resistance to the loss of a major riverine wilderness: there too karst areas unknown to cavers were to be destroyed. Lake Pedder fell from the headlines until the early 1970s, although ongoing biological research revealed Pedder to be a unique ecosystem with numerous endemic species which faced probable extinction (Bayley, Swain, Tyler and Lake 1972). The Reece Labor Government lost office in 1969.

A more radical public group, the Lake Pedder Action Committee (LPAC) emerged in 1971, and it was as secretary of that group that my own involvement increased. By the following year the Serpentine dam was already completed and the flood-waters were within a few kilometres of Lake Pedder. A move in the upper house failed to produce a referendum. In addition to their public campaign, several LPAC members infiltrated the very small Centre Party (= Country Party) whose sole parliamentary representative was the deputy premier, Kevin Lyons who opened the Hobart Conference of this federation in 1970, and was a brother of one of the principal protagonists involved in the split which provided Tasmania with a new cave group in the late 1960s. Several LPAC members were elected to the state council of the party, and ripples resulted from questions about Lake Pedder being raised by Lyons in the state parliament. In February 1972 Lyons resigned from the Liberal-Centre coalition government and thereby forced a state election, at which conservation candidates stood as a body called the United Tasmania Group (UTG) and nearly gained seats despite a press advertising campaign against them by the HEC.

Several other elements in the process should now be apparent. Firstly, although unprecedented public disquiet was evident, the rejection of any HEC proposal still seemed unthinkable. Secondly there was a readiness to be very selective in regard to the findings of a parliamentary enquiry. Thirdly conservationists were becoming more vocal and very politically involved.

A scientific element crept into public awareness. The International Biological Programme of UNESCO and the IUCN called for a halt to the flood. On 13 July 1972 there was an unsuccessful attempt to reopen the upper house enquiry, stimulated by a petition from life scientists from around Australia. Scientific values were ignored by the Tasmanian government, just as they were to be ignored a decade later when the archaeological caves of the Franklin River were capturing scientific headlines world wide. When legal opinion suggested the flooding of the national park was illegal the Attorney General resigned because cabinet refused to allow him to grant his fiat to a citizen action by LPAC members against the government's Commission. This incurred the wrath of the bar association and the church amid claims that the action contravened the Magna Carta. Retrospective legislation passed the parliament and the Attorney General resumed his post. The government had got away with it and a precedent had been established. Similar retrospective legislation was enacted in 1981 to validate flooding of part of the Cradle Mt - Lake St. Clair National Park by the Pieman Scheme. Meanwhile conservationists had turned their Pedder lobbying towards Canberra. On 2 December 1972 the ALP was elected to national government. It was a very different ALP to the state branch which had resumed government in Tasmania earlier in the same year, and on 23 February 1973 it honoured a pre-election promise to establish a committee of enquiry in a bid to halt the flooding. The Tasmanian government and HEC refused to give evidence. In an interim report

released in June 1973 the enquiry recommended a moratorium on the flooding, with any costs to be borne by the national government. In September two Pedder protestors disappeared under highly suspicious circumstances while flying to Canberra by light aircraft to lobby for support for this proposal. The federal government accepted the argument that Pedder was a national responsibility and offered a blank cheque to Tasmania to cover costs in developing an alternative scheme. The offer was refused and Lake Pedder drowned.

Recurrent problems highlighted during the Pedder and subsequent debates have included the inappropriate structure of government machinery, whereby functionally narrow agencies pursue narrowly defined objectives; the existence of outdated legislation founded upon very narrow values; and the complications posed by existing long term development rights. The Hydro Electric Commission, for instance is "an autonomous, semi-governmental authority responsible almost entirely for the conduct of its own affairs. The Minister administering the Hydro Electric Commission Act is answerable to parliament for the activities of the Commission but the Commission is not directed by or responsible to the Minister as is a government department". (Tasmania 1967 : 327). The Commission is therefore able to act as a defacto government with respect to power supply and attempt to present the parliament with a 'fait accompli'. A further problem, but one of diminishing significance has been the resistance to upstart youth and changed values. This was exemplified in 1973 by the premiers public attack upon me for daring to question him when I was not even old enough to vote - at the time I was 20 years old, and while the 18 year old franchise had not yet been proclaimed it had been accepted by government. The Whitlam government was perceived in Tasmania merely as impetuous youth in parliamentary clothing. Despite all of this Pedder was recognised as a national possession, but federal initiatives to safeguard it were defeated, in the final analysis, by bureaucratic insensitivity, even arrogance; by the intransigence of insular government; and by the pride of old men. Facts were of diminishing significance to the final outcome, for while Lake Pedder was tossed upon stormy seas of materialism it foundered upon the rock of pride. Clearly the HEC had extraordinary power : Premier Reece was known to consult it not merely on matters of energy supply but on the direction of general government policy. And in the wake of failure at Lake Pedder the conservation movement would have to fight harder for the Gordon-Franklin than it may have had to in the wake of success at Pedder and a decade of Tasmania adjusting to the greater legitimacy of conservation as an institution. Pedder had opened a Pandora's box of nested sub-issue.

### *POST-PEDDER STRUCTURAL CHANGES*

The monosyllabic planning which fuelled the Lake Pedder debate also exposed grave weaknesses in Tasmania's legislative arrangements for environmental protection. The Scenery Preservation Act lay agape in toothless glory. But when the Liberal-Centre coalition gained office in 1969 it brought with it a policy for a National Parks and Wildlife Service. Mr. Ron Brown, a member of the SWC and one time Legislative Councillor for the Huon, was instrumental in having this policy, initially proposed by Ms Anita Damgard and Mr. Don Field, accepted by the Liberal Party. I suggest that the birth of the Service at that time is directly attributable to the far sighted, individual efforts of those people. The later passage of an Environmental Protection Act and the establishment of a Department of the Environment was a direct result of the UTG entry into the 1972 state election. With the probability of conservationists polling strongly the ALP plagiarized some of the UTG policies and on regaining office found itself stuck with it. There is more than one way to skin a cat! The Department remains toothless however, preoccupied with popping-it-in-a litter-bin while the South-West drowns, our forests are carted away to Japan to be converted into junk packaging and Hobart's Derwent River carries toxic levels of heavy metals such as mercury, zinc and cadmium which in some cases are at world record levels, exceeding even those of Japan's infamous Minamata Bay. But while the Apple Isle vanished with the fruit industry and the holiday isle was becoming the isle of galvanised oysters the establishment of these new agencies provided niches to be filled by conservationists of professional rather than activist orientation. And outside Tasmania, Pedder contributed a great deal to stimulating efforts to increase federal environmental powers, including establishment of the Committee of Enquiry into the National Estate.

### *THE STATUS OF KARST IN 1970*

1970 provides a useful benchmark against which to measure progress in karst protection over subsequent years, for not only does it predate the main bourgeoning of environmental awareness in

Australia, with its offspring concepts of public participation in planning, but in karst terms it also represents the rediscovery (or perhaps discovery) of Tasmania by mainland speleologists. Exploration was still centred upon 3 or 4 principal areas and there was little known of the South-West karsts, apart from Brian Collin's tentative steps towards Mt. Anne. Discoveries in Exit Cave had made it the deepest and longest known cave in the southern hemisphere (Goede 1968), and then the depth record was broken again in Tassy Pot shortly before the 1970 ASF Congress in Tasmania (Kiernan 1971a). This attracted many mainland enthusiasts to the state and set the stage for further dramatic discoveries and depth records in the following days and months (Kiernan 1971b, 1972).

But although organised speleology in Tasmania was well into its third decade there had been no new reserves proclaimed to protect any of the many discoveries which had been made over that time. From a review of existing cave reserves which I published in 1974 many of the problems of 1970, some of them unknown to us, become evident: in addition to the fact that there were simply too few reserves none of those existing had been delineated on the basis of ecological or hydrological criteria; only sites with potential economic value as tourist venues had been reserved; many reserves were enshrined only in folklore; some protected only the entrance and not the body of the cave; reserve declarations lay scattered among myriad pieces of legislation or potentially temporary department whim; and the potential existed for boundaries to be altered, interference permitted or entire reserves extinguished without public knowledge (Kiernan 1974). Some karst was inadvertently but fortuitously protected in national parks, although in the case of the Florentine Valley most of the karst had been revoked from the Mt. Field National Park to permit logging. But when most of the major caves were excluded from a mineral exploration licence at Mole Creek it had been openly admitted to be a bid to avert another Lake Pedder type row. The South-West? We simply didn't know if there were any caves in it, but the potential certainly seemed to be there (Harris 1967, Harris & Kiernan 1971, Kiernan 1974).

(See Figure 1).

### *THE PRECIPITOUS BLUFF CONFLICT : A MAJOR THREAT TO WILDERNESS KARST*

The first major threat to wilderness karst arose only 12 months after the 1970 ASF conference. In 1938 a geologist had reported caves in the limestone flanks of Precipitous Bluff above New River Lagoon, and in the 1960s a number of these had been explored by a Tasmanian Caverneering Club party who flew to the lagoon by tiger moth sea plane. (Goede et al 1973). In December 1971 Mineral Holdings (Australia) Pty. Ltd. applied for an exploration licence over 32km<sup>2</sup> but the application was declared invalid. A second application for 40km<sup>2</sup> lodged a month later was met by several objections from wilderness conservationists. In December 1972 a mining warden, Mr. J. Temple-Smith, rejected the licence application because the value of the area in its "pristine and primeval condition far outweighs the nebulous benefits which could be expected from mining activity". This incensed the pro-development lobby. An appeal was lodged by Mineral Holdings amid mounting public outcry. (Wessing 1978). There were reports that the Tasmanian government intended a bet each way and that it would declare the area a national park, but allow mining under the management plan. The stage seemed set for a major conflict.

Speleologists bought into this issue in 1972 when I led a national expedition to the Precipitous Bluff caves to gather information and publicity supportive of the conservation case. Participants came from several Australian states and from New Zealand. Two lengthy outflow caves and some pot-holes were explored, and other entrances were recorded (Kiernan 1975a; Middleton and Montgomery 1973; Pavey, Fisher and Radcliffe 1973). The project gained considerable media attention and the discovery of a number of new invertebrate species in the cave came at a time when the loss of unique species at Lake Pedder was still in the public mind. The expedition provided photographic material to the Australian EXPO display at Spokane, Washington. Although the local municipal newspaper condemned the cavers activities, the explorations perhaps helped a little to put a human face on an area little known by the public but for reports of esoteric court-room battles.

An application by Mineral Holdings to the Master of the Supreme Court in chambers for a declaration against the mining warden's decision was unsuccessful. But following a Supreme Court hearing Mr. Justice Nettlefold found, on 8 June 1973, that the objectors were not competent to object because they lacked any proprietary estate or interest, and so reversed the warden's decision. Subsequently through the good offices of federal conservation minister Dr. Moss Cass, Urban and Regional Affairs Minister, Tom Uren and Attorney General, Lionel Murphy the federal government undertook to finance an appeal by conservationists. This led to a major clash between Tasmanian Premier Reece and Prime

Minister Gough Whitlam. Whitlam singled out Precipitous Bluff as a major feature of Australia's threatened heritage in a statement announcing the Committee of Enquiry into the National Estate. But in subsequent ruling the full bench of the Supreme Court dismissed the conservationists appeal. This finding was subsequently reaffirmed by appeals to the High Court and to the full bench of the High Court. Conservationists still have no legal standing under the Tasmanian Mines Act.

Notwithstanding this, the public furore was such that in 1976 the Tasmanian government announced that Precipitous Bluff was to be included in the South-West National Park, and mining disallowed under the management plan. But this was to involve a trade-off whereby part of the Hartz Mts. National Park was to be revoked to compensate a paper pulp company for unused concession area foregone. The company has since closed down for at least two years. The swap ultimately occurred, despite conservationist resistance. This issue dovetailed into the whole question of wilderness park planning in Tasmania.

## *PLANNING PARKLANDS : CAVERS IN THE COGS*

### (i) THE OFFICIALS:

I have already mentioned that the advent of new government agencies charged with environmental protection provided niches for conservationists of professional orientation. Although relations between the activists and professionals were rather low key for a long time, and in some cases even hostile, the emergence of dedicated conservationists in the agencies, including some karst enthusiasts had been significant. In addition existing departments such as Lands and Forestry saw the public relations value of getting in on the environmental act. Environmentally concerned officers could at least have an impact. The Lands Department developed a network of recreational reserves, and the Forestry Commission developed small reserves at such areas as the Julius River caves, and also Lake Chisholm, a beautiful karstic lake.

While there had long been concern at the prospect of dams in the Gordon-Franklin area, an important contribution came from a one-time member of the Tasmanian Caverneering Club, David Steane, who as an official in the new management branch of the Lands Department asked in a departmental report in the mid 1970s whether Tasmania should perhaps retain a wild river, and focussed his comments upon the Franklin in particular. In addition to laying the foundation for the concept of a Wild River National Park and shifting the focus away from the Lower Gordon to a degree and onto the Franklin in particular, it was encouraging for conservationists to be aware of such a sentiment in a department where it was not expected. After the inevitable leak I enthusiastically embraced Steane's argument and as chairman of the South-West Tasmania Action Committee at that time, and later as founding director of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, I was able to strongly promote this concept in conservation circles. Those who followed me at the helm of TWS, firstly Dr. Norm Sanders and later Dr. Bob Brown, have continued to do so.

Several karst enthusiasts have become involved in the National Parks and Wildlife Service where they have been in a position to work for karst protection and have provided receptive ears for proposals from outside government. One of them had been attracted to Tasmania through the Precipitous Bluff expedition and was a former member of the Colong Caves and Bungonia Committees; Greg Middleton of the Sydney Speleological Society. Within a few months of returning from Precipitous Bluff he had obtained a position in the National Parks and Wildlife Service where he was responsible for investigating potential new reserves, and he has since risen to the position of Chief Resources Officer. Others later to join the Resources Division have included one-time Southern Caving Society president Stephen Harris, and, for a time, former vice president of this Federation Andrew Skinner. These people were able to take a personal interest in the fate of karst areas, and a number of reserve proposals have been perused at various times. In subsequent years the service has been successful in establishing reserves to protect Exit Cave and Kubla Khan Cave. Some of the problem reserves have been rationalised, with control being assumed of reserves at Trowutta and June Cave. Various karsts have been adventitiously protected within larger reserves, such as the extended parklands in the South-West. Despite this considerable work remains, particularly in the more classical areas such as Mole Creek.

### (ii) THE ACTIVISTS:

The preparation of plans for extensions to the South-West National Park became a major preoccupation

of wilderness conservationists in the mid 1970s, and provided another avenue whereby cave enthusiasts could work towards karst protection. The initial impetus came from these "private enterprise" conservation groups. While the SWC had long proposed extensions to the SWNP, their revised proposal in the early 1970s acceded to development in various areas such as the Middle Gordon and southern forests, and covered none of the country north of the Strathgordon road nor the Lower Gordon and Franklin. Many of the problems in the South-West seemed to me to be due to a piecemeal perspective whereby conservationists fought for individual areas and not the region as a whole. At the 1974 state conference of the UTG I successfully proposed new boundaries of a vastly expanded national park to be adopted as party policy. This was the first formal proposal for a national park to protect the wild rivers, together with such areas as the Prince of Wales and Denison Ranges, and it also aimed to link the SWNP to the Cradle Mt - Lake St. Clair National Park in the north west centre of the island (fig. 2). Karst areas were considered in defining these boundaries although the broader conservation movement undoubtedly had little interest in karst. Key elements of the plan as far as karst was concerned included the protection also of various karsts in the Gordon-Franklin area including Mt. Ronald Cross; protection also of Precipitous Bluff; the Cracroft; the Mt. Anne area; most of the Weld River area; and the adoption of then unprotected Exit Cave as a cornerpost for a boundary extension to protect the Southern Ranges. But the main aim was to turn thinking towards the region rather than the sites, and to reaffirm the importance of those areas ignored by the SWC. The latter factor led to protracted and bitter debate between more conservative and more radical factions within the conservation movement.

The UTG plan stimulated a great deal of discussion. By this time conservation activities were becoming more vocal as logging roads pressed deeper into the South-West and the dams threat loomed. This led to the advent of the South West Tasmania Action Committee, and as chairman of that body I successfully proposed a slightly larger plan which gave an added protection to the Weld River karst. Meanwhile the Australian Conservation Foundation had also opted for the larger plan, with some further boundary refinements, and most groups generally came to subscribe to the idea of a big park. Even the then very conservative Tasmanian Conservation Trust broadly followed on, with some unfortunate concessions. Again infiltration was a critical factor with the staunch but respectable Jamie Kirkpatrick a member of its South-West policy committee and myself as its chairman.

Up until this time Tasmanian conservation had been characterised by a myriad of small ad hoc committees which had sprung up whenever any threat loomed to a national park or wilderness area. Seldom had these specific groups had more than two or three members, camouflaged by a letterhead (e.g. South-West firing range; Freycinet granite quarries) although some groups were slightly larger (e.g. LPAC). In 1976 I proposed the formation of a Tasmanian Wilderness Society, and in retribution was made its founding Director. One of its earliest activities was a series of field trips designed to increase membership awareness of karst, to areas such as the Weld Valley (logging threat) and to Loongana (dam threat). A series of state government enquiries around this time finally led to a successful recommendation that the ACF boundaries be declared a Conservation Area under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, and that any proposed land-use changes within it be subject to examination by an advisory committee. While this fell far short of being a national park it at least meant that the various protagonists agreed on the broad boundaries for their arguments. However some of the southern karst areas were protected when interim extensions were made to the SWNP in 1976. Many of the more northerly areas were protected in May 1981 when a Wild Rivers National Park was proclaimed by the state Labor government, finally linking the SWNP to the CMLSCNP such that parkland covered 763,400ha, though some areas remained unprotected, including the Denison Range where the Lake Rhona area was burnt out by an escape from an illegal Australian Newsprint Mills regeneration fire in late 1982.

### *THE GORDON-FRANKLIN DEBATE*

The professional and activist wings of the wilderness movement have drawn closest in the current debate over the South-West dams. On paper Tasmanians are the largest consumers of electricity in the world but in fact much of this power goes to a handful of low employment, capital intensive industries owned by outside interests. Some 50% of Tasmania's loan funds are spent on dams and power stations, debts on HEC borrowings amount to \$865 million or \$2045 per man, woman and child in Tasmania, and the annual interest bill is over \$50 million and consumes 43.4% of HEC revenue. To add a further 180 megawatts to the states grid, or about 12% of the projected output of

Victoria's Loy Yang station, the Hydro Electric Commission proposes to spend a minimum of \$550 million damming the Gordon River below its confluence with the Franklin, thereby inundating the most extensive of the western Tasmanian karsts - despite strong evidence that energy conservation and alternative methods of generation are viable options, and while the heaviest consumers appear to be winding down.

The limestone outcrops of the Gordon-Franklin are largely unmapped but are undoubtedly extensive (Kiernan 1979). In the early 1960s members of the TCC twice visited the Gordon area and examined several small caves, using boats and foot transport for access. However exploration of this remote region was then overshadowed by dramatic discoveries in more accessible areas such as Mole Creek, Junee Florentine, Ida Bay and Hastings.

In 1971 Stephen Harris and myself pointed out the likely threat to caves posed by proposed HEC Schemes. (Harris and Kiernan 1971). That same year an early rafting party reported caves along the banks of the Franklin. (Morley 1971; Koolhof 1974). Later in 1971 Stephen and Chriss Harris and myself investigated some possible routes to the Franklin limestone. My first attempt to reach the limestone areas from the upstream direction ended tragically on 6 January 1972 when my companion Olegas Truchanas, was drowned in a canoeing accident on the Gordon near the Serpentine junction. In October 1972 I led a further trip from the Crotty area. The party included a number of cave enthusiasts, including Andrew Skinner, at that time a colleague in a small group which formed in a hurried but successful attempt to halt a planned tri-services firing range in the South-West. The party examined several karst areas in the light of leaked information on aspects of the damming scheme, and then as secretary of the LPAC I released a major media statement detailing the HEC's plans and the features threatened, including both known and likely caves. This gained wide media coverage and increased media pressure on the HEC. In 1973 the recently arrived Greg Middleton and I joined with a large contingent of Sydney Speleos on a voyage aboard the tourist vessel Denison Star up the Lower Gordon. The idea crystallised that by documenting caves we might make a contribution to the conservation case.

After the visitors departure Greg Middleton and myself made a bid to reach the limestone in the Nicholls Range from where HEC reports had indicated the presence of caves, but we ran out of time in the scrub of the Hamilton Range. A track to the Gordon Splits has since been cut by bush-walkers, who took some years to cut it along the route we sought to follow. As late as 1974 HEC Commissioner, Sir Alan Knight was still seeking to discredit conservationists with a claim that "there is no Lower Gordon Scheme to condemn". Shades of Pedder! There was abundant evidence to the contrary. During Easter 1974 a small party explored part of the Gordon-Franklin area (Hawkins, Kiernan & Middleton 1974). Later Bob Hawkins and Greg Middleton purchased New Zealand Hamilton jet boats to aid upriver exploration and in January 1975 caves were explored in the Nicholls Range, Gordon-Sprent and Franklin areas (Middleton and Sefton 1975; Kiernan 1975b). More caves were explored the following summer at Nicholls Range. (Middleton 1977, Kiernan 1977). In 1977 Canadian canoes and a motorised punt carried cavers up the Franklin. Fraser Cave was among many caves recorded, some of which were given the names of political decision makers in whose hands the future of the area lay. Reviews of the emerging picture of wilderness karst were provided to conservationists publications (Kiernan 1976b, 1978a, Middleton 1978). The parties also established a pattern of providing film for TV useage, and carrying media crews who prepared nationally distributed documentary material.

It was not until 1976 that the first small rubber rafts took to the Franklin and the river became a popular recreational waterway. More caves were explored in 1978, 1979 and 1980. (Middleton 1980a,b, Kiernan 1978b). Much of the impetus for all this exploration came from Greg Middleton, who published a major review in 1979 (Middleton 1979). The exploration was conducted under the banner of SSS and no local clubs expressed any interest in joining it. In response to public pressure a very inadequate survey of the Franklin caves was undertaken by the HEC (Naqvi 1979) the many shortcomings of which have been detailed elsewhere. (Kiernan 1980, Jones 1981). In January 1981 Greg Middleton guided two archaeologists to the Nicholls Range. They were successful in finding a small surface site, and excavated in one small cave, apparently without success. (Middleton 1982). A couple of weeks later I led a TWS party to the Goodwins Creek karst on the lower Jane River, a tributary of the Franklin, and while returning downstream we visited some of the Franklin caves and first recognised the archaeological significance of one of them: it was none other than that which bore the name of the current Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. (Kiernan 1981b).



This focussed attention upon the caves and their archaeology, and the area received massive publicity both nationally and internationally as a consequence of the discovery and subsequent pilot excavation. Members of the Senate Select Committee on SW Tasmania flew to Fraser Cave and it was there that they heard the verbal submissions of two of Australia's leading prehistorians, Prof. John Mulvaney and Dr. Rhys Jones. Further archaeological discoveries were made in February 1981 (Kiernan 1981c) and January-February 1982 (Kiernan 1982, this volume, Harris, this volume). During a visit by Tasmanian parliamentarian Dr. Norm Sanders and myself we found a further surface site exposed long ago by HEC siteworks despite the Commission's claim in their project proposal that no archaeological sites existed in the project area. In parliament Sanders questioned either the integrity or competence of the HEC. A few weeks later he moved a motion of no confidence in the state Labor government.

In 1979 the Hydro Electric Commission had formally presented its project proposal to the state government. During the subsequent state election the Liberal Party, under Geoff Pearsall, a moderate whose maiden speech in the House some years before had focussed upon his recent visit to Exit Cave, followed its usual tradition of wholehearted support to each and every HEC proposal - but it could easily have gone the other way because Pearsall had previously claimed at a public meeting that the HEC proposal "had holes big enough to drive a bus through" and the Liberals decision seemed more a hasty and tactically dubious decision to have a policy rather than one about a policy. The Labor Party under Doug Lowe, a moderate who sought to placate lobbyists of the Pedder era by assuring them that "Eric won't always be in charge" refused to allow the Franklin to become an issue. Labor won. A number of documentary films showed the rivers to a wider public, while the HEC plans continued to dominate the news media. The Directorate of Energy recommended that rather than flood the Franklin the government should opt for a smaller dam on the Gordon above the Olga (which would still flood the Nicholls Range karst area), coupled with a 200 MW thermal station. As the cabinet decision drew closer Lowe indicated probable support for the Directorate's proposal, but two days later comments from the HEC swung his support to the Gordon-below-Franklin. The Commissions strongest advocate, former NP & WS minister Neil Batt was away overseas when cabinet met a day later and opted for a hydro course. At the next meeting two days later Lowe supported saving the Franklin and a subsequent caucus meeting opted for the smaller scheme. Deputy Premier Michael Barnard was a crucial advocate for the Franklin, together with HEC and Resources Minister Andrew Lohrey, and back benchers Michael Aird and Mary Willey - and as the first Premier prepared to question the HEC Doug Lowe's role was critical. The HEC was furious. Lohrey was subsequently dumped from Cabinet for advocating ministerial control of the HEC. The Liberals moved and lost a motion of no confidence, in the government, inspired by their energy spokesman Robert Mather who as an executive member of the Hobart Walking Club in the earliest Pedder days had engineered the acceptance of Lake Pedder's destruction by Tasmania's biggest outdoor organisation. The Gordon-above-Olga bill passed the lower House.

A pro-dams pressure group had developed within the HEC, while another formed under the patronage of former Premiers Reece and Bethune and former HEC Commissioner Sir Alan Knight. It is a measure of prevailing attitudes in Tasmania that this "Dad's Army" was able to exert any influence. A Select Committee of the Legislative Council, chaired by long-time advocate of mines and dams Mr. Harry Braid, supported the HEC and the Council backed itself into the same corner as the Liberal Party. The support of the trade union movement swung behind the Liberal Party, despite an admission to cabinet by HEC Commissioner Russell Ashton that jobs would not be lost if the governments new plan was adopted. The commission became even more nervous of criticism and attempted to silence Prof. John Burton, chairman of the former Lake Pedder Enquiry. After his critical comments made in the professional journal "Engineers Australia", it threatened to sue both Burton and the publishers if there was any repetition. The HEC had previously threatened to sue the Department of the Environment if it released to the public a report containing passages critical of the Commission for impeding environmental studies.

In 1981 the government threw down the gauntlet to the Legislative Council by declaring a Franklin-Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and offering it for World Heritage status. Power-plays were rife within the ALP and the dam proponents reversed the policy of the state party, but this was not binding on the parliamentary branch. As part of a push to unseat Lowe, several ministers openly dissented from saving the Franklin. Lowe was unceremoniously dumped only a week after Geoff Pearsall had been replaced as Liberal leader by a staunch HEC advocate from Melbourne, Robin Gray. Gray trumpeted that mainlanders should stop interfering in Tasmanian affairs and let Tasmania decide. The government was forced to a referendum. As part of the move to oust Lowe

the no dams option was excluded from the ballot paper within days of Lowe having promised it, while powerful factions wrestled for control of the ALP. The public was only given a choice between the two dams. Some 47% voted for flooding the Franklin, only 7% for the Olga option, and a massive 46% voted informally, with 33% of the total voters having written "no dams" on their ballot paper. Conservationists interpreted this a majority against flooding the Franklin, dam proponents including the ALP took the converse view. The Legislative Council continued to precipitate a constitutional crisis. Lowe and his former whip Mary Willey resigned from the ALP to sit on the cross-benches with Australian Democrat Norm Sanders, leaving new Premier Harry Holgate at the helm of a minority government. Holgate bought the support of television naturalist Harry Butler, and then prorogued parliament to buy time. When it resumed Sanders moved a successful motion of no confidence, which was supported by Lowe, Willey and the Liberals. At the May 1982 election the Liberal Party came to office, and a bill to flood the Franklin was passed by both houses. Meanwhile at federal level the ALP had adopted a "no dams" policy.

In September 1982 14,125 ha of the Franklin-Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and 14,200 ha of the South West Conservation Area were revoked and vested in the HEC. A further 780 ha of the national parks comprising the bulk of the Franklin River karst, will remain in the park until 1st January 1990, supposedly to allow archaeological studies of the cave deposits to be undertaken.

Resistance was increasing at a national level. A series of "no dams" write-ins on ballot papers during mainland elections culminated in a massive 40% "no dams vote" in late 1982 for the federal seat of Flinders in Victoria. As the possible implications of World Heritage status sunk in the new Liberal government in Tasmania sought to beat up a States Rights issue out of the nomination, firstly by asking the federal Liberal Government to withdraw the nomination, which had been given added credibility by the Fraser Cave discoveries and the representation of many of the world's leading archaeologists, and secondly by attacking the prospect of the national government invoking foreign affairs powers in order to honour Australia's obligations as a signatory to the international World Heritage Convention. The international archaeologists comments were published as a full page advertisement in The Australian newspaper. In federal parliament the Prime Minister revealed that he had received over 6000 letters on the Franklin. From the first decision by cavers to explore the Gordon-Franklin area to gather information supportive of the conservation case, the caves of the region, and particularly the cave to which they had attached the Prime Minister's name, had emerged as arguably the most compelling element in the case against the dams.

In its report of November 1982 the Senate Select Committee concluded that there was no urgent need to commence construction of a new power scheme, and supported alternatives to the Franklin dam. It urged the Australian Government to fulfill its obligations under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. This decision was based upon economic arguments and the archaeological importance of the Franklin caves, the Committee repeating Prof. John Mulvaney's viewpoint that destruction of the caves "would be the greatest desecration of archaeological sites in Australia .. that, for the Stone Age of the World, it is the equivalent of destroying the Pyramids" (Australia, 1982:204). The only dissenting voice was that of its chairman, Tasmanian Liberal Senator Brian Archer. A subsequent bill to ensure that Australia honoured its obligations under the World Heritage Convention passed the senate. The issue had set Tasmania against Tasmania, Labor against Labor, Liberal against Liberal and now potentially the two houses of federal parliament were also at loggerheads.

While mainland newspapers editorialised against the dams the Tasmania media and Premier Gray tried to promote the idea that Tasmanians had magically become unanimous in support of the flood, and appealed to Tasmania xenophobia by demanding an end to interference by mainlanders. Meanwhile the TWS was organising a physical blockade of the site works, which had commenced in Spring 1982. Talk of rifts in the state Liberal Party were both initiated and suppressed by Gray's dictatorial control of the party he had led to office in its own right for the first time ever. Special police powers legislation was passed to cater for the blockade and one of Gray's reputed critics, Attorney General Max Bingham was despatched to Paris, ostensibly in a bid to dissuade the World Heritage Committee from ratifying the nomination, but possibly to get him out of the Premier's hair.

But in early December 1982 federal cabinet decided not to intervene because of protestations that the sacred cow of states rights must not be challenged. Australia it seemed was still not to be one nation. The absence, due to illness of Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, considered a closest conservationist in the cabinet, was probably a critical factor. Although he had delayed forcing

the issue in Cabinet pending Fraser's return, Environment Minister Tom McVeigh was finally forced to proceed, without his strongest potential ally, at the last Cabinet meeting prior to the World Heritage meeting. Cabinet chose not to intervene on the dam, but insisted the heritage nomination would go ahead, and offered the federal police to assist the Tasmanian government during the blockade. It claimed the cave deposits would be salvaged by a proven process of resin impregnation. Prof. John Mulvaney publicly ridiculed the suggestion and as a protest gesture resigned in disgust from the interim board of the Museum of Australia. The Australian Archaeological Association described the proposal as utter nonsense and the government's statements as deliberately misleading, and condemned the decision not to intervene as cowardly and irresponsible. A meeting between an AAA delegation and Minister McVeigh degenerated into a swearing match. Salvage archaeology was informally declared black by the association. Longstanding rifts between the Tasmanian aboriginal community, the archaeological fraternity and the conservation movement shrank overnight in the face of the mutual enemy of political intransigence. Virtually every major newspaper in Australia condemned the Cabinet decision in editorials, an exception being the Hobart Mercury which rejoiced.

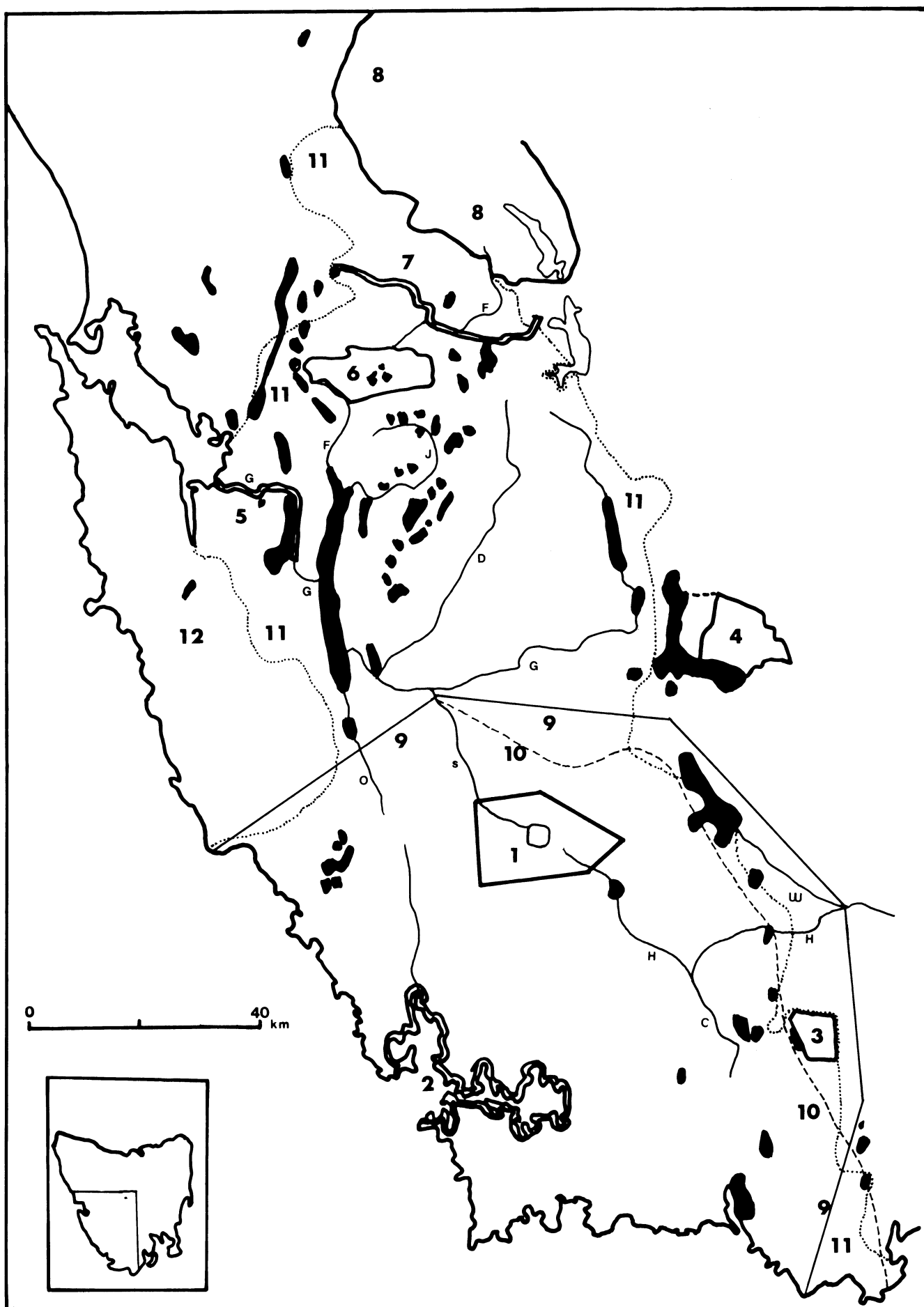
On 13 December 1982 the World Heritage Commission listed South-West Tasmania, recommending that Australia nominate its upgrading to the list of World Heritage in Danger. The blockade commenced the following day and by the time HEC workers commenced their Christmas holidays three days later, some 196 conservationists had been arrested, including a millionaire businessman, grandmothers and younger folk. They were charged with trespass and many were incarcerated in Hobart's Risdon Prison when they refused to accept bail conditions which forbade their return to the Gordon-Franklin. Democate member of state parliament Dr. Norman Sanders resigned his seat in protest at the arrests, and announced his intention to contest a Senate seat. Around the same time the prestigious American journal Science carried a full page editorial on the Franklin caves issue (Lewin 1982). Although not editorially supporting the conservationists the national Australian newspaper could not ignore the fact that TWS Director Bob Brown was nominated by over 80% of those readers who suggested contenders for that daily's selection as Australian of the year. In early January 1983 Brown was released after nearly three weeks in prison, and within 24 hours had been easily elected by recount to fill Sanders seat in the House of Assembly. As this conference draws to a close, a major article on Fraser Cave (Kiernan et al 1983) is due to appear in the journal Nature, considered by some to be the world's most prestigious scientific publication. The federal government seems unlikely to accede to pressure to reverse its decision not to intervene and the conservation movement is planning a major campaign in marginal seats against the Liberal Party in this years national election. The issue is far from over.

## *SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS*

Clearly, although conservation has been a dominant theme in Tasmanian politics for many years, karst issues have, until very recently, been only a minor component of it. But since the prospect of drowning Lake Pedder raised the spectre of karst areas of unknown significance falling to a similar fate, an element of the speleo fraternity in Tasmania has responded to the threat. The situation in Tasmania is peculiar insofar as the greatest threat to karst in this state is to unknown or little known areas, rather than to known major features. Conservationists have had to defend the unknown, while at the same time trying to find out about it. Perhaps this constitutes a classical form of wilderness conservation. The poor resource inventory which many observers have considered to underlie land-use problems in Tasmania is exemplified by the situation with respect to karst. Because of these problems, karst has become intertwined over a number of years with the principal issues in Tasmanian politics and at the present time the significance of one karst area is utterly fundamental to an issue which has toppled a government; instigated constitutional crisis; personally involved the Prime Minister; promoted debate in the national parliament; seen Australia become the first nation to breach the World Heritage Convention; precipitated a major row over states rights under the Australian constitution; seriously split the two major political parties; far transcended the boundaries of those parties; seen hundreds arrested and imprisoned; and turned Tasmanian against Tasmanian as never before. Whether that is a good or bad thing, the fact remains that it has happened, and that is significant. But advocates for the protection of areas where karst is a primary rather than subsidiary resource no longer have the advantage of promoting something novel and new in a "first strike".

None of this is attributable to the usual advocates of karst, the caving clubs, whose approach to cave protection in Tasmania has always been low key. The clubs have prepared the odd submission

Figure 1: Limestone and dolomite outcrops in south-west Tasmania.



for localised reserves, but it has been the political climate rather than the factual argument which has seen them fail or prosper. Factions exist within the Tasmanian caving fraternity to a degree which found its ultimate expression of idiocy in the deliberate sabotage of one club's proposal for Exit Cave reserve by an individual member of a rival club. Many of Tasmania's staunchest and most knowledgeable karst advocates are not members of this Federation.

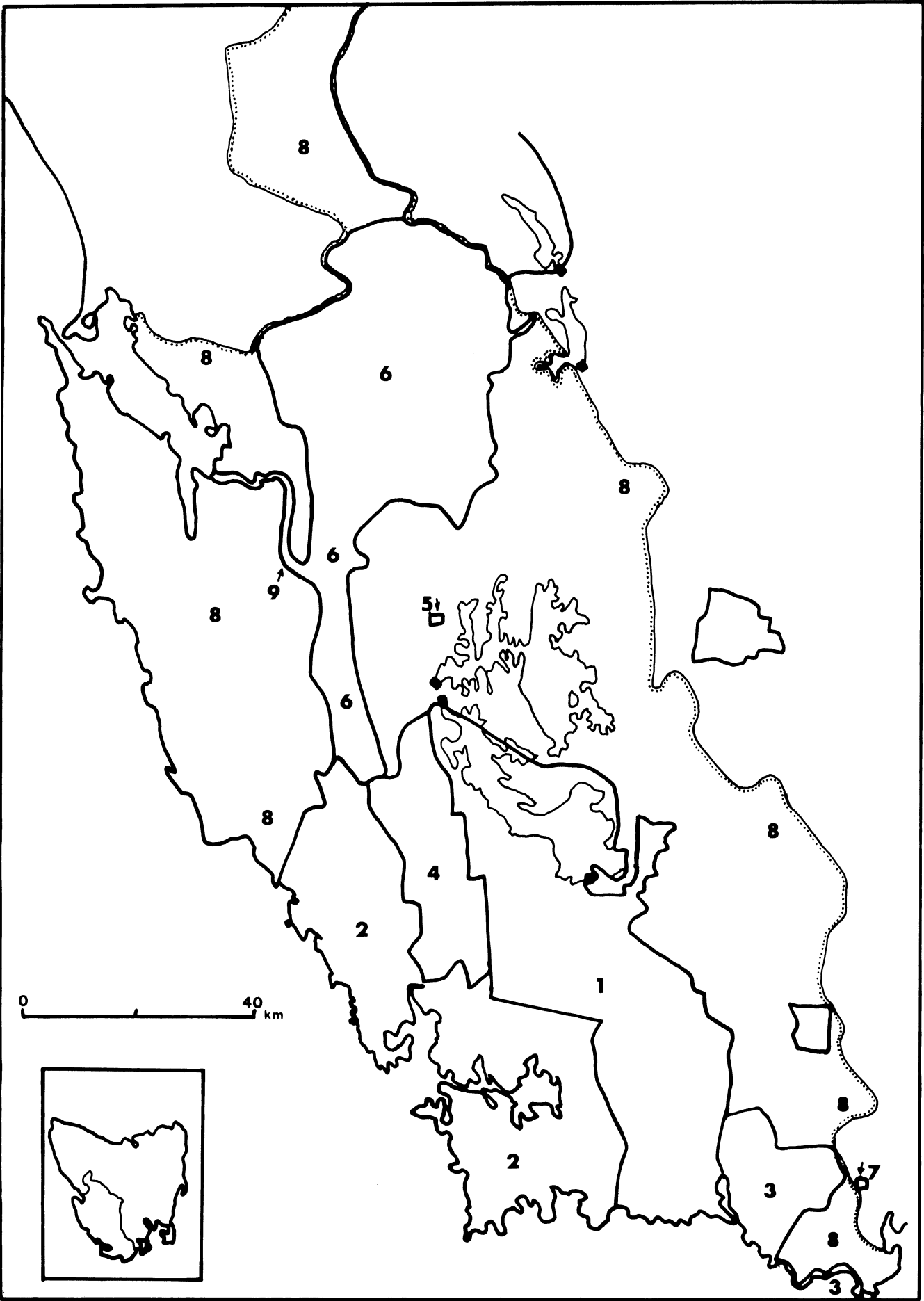
The reason for the intensity of debate in Tasmania over land-use options transcends questions of energy, dams, mines or woodchipping. All these things are merely symptoms. To challenge any is to challenge the whole basis of Tasmanian existence; to challenge the power elites and the basic assumptions handed down like heirlooms from father to son, from parliament to parliament (in a society where both can mean much the same thing). There are dozens of nested sub-issues. One of the reasons for the growth of the Conservation movement in Tasmania is probably the simple fact that it represents the nearest approach to a political opposition, in a state where the principle debate between the major parties tends to revolve around who can do the same thing best rather than whether it should be done at all.

That karst has become embroiled in all this is the result of some of the individuals concerned about re-routing the direction of Tasmanian development having also been karst enthusiasts, concerned to ensure that karst gained a measure of protection amid the turmoil. While some contribution towards two small cave reserves is the sum total attributable to the local caving clubs by the most generous observer, probably two or three dozen entire karst areas have been given national park status due to the efforts of others. This degree of success, if that is what it is, is not the result of restrained submission of proposals by concerned citizens to a bureaucratic enuch, but results from the fact that concerned individuals have actively sought out positions of influence, and then worked from those positions with the protection of karst as one of their priorities. The efforts of Greg Middleton, who would be regarded by xenophobic Tasmanians as an interfering mainlanders, exemplifies this process. While on the subject of xenophobia, the efforts of the Sydney Speleological Society also deserve to be singled out for praise. The vociferous response of the Tasmanian Nomenclature Board to SSS for having had the temerity to name some Tasmanian caves says much of the peculiarities of the Tasmanian ethos. I might add that the application of politicians names to the Franklin Caves followed a previous case in N.S.W. - curiously, while the Goolwa Conference of this Federation considered this to be an appropriate tactic for gaining publicity in 1968 it chose to regard it as an inappropriate action when taken in Tasmania for more subtle reasons in 1977. Even as a descendant of two political exiles to Tasmania I could still develop a trace of xenophobia after five generations of isolation and breeding in the ecocide isle. The latest word on this particular subsaga is that alternative names proposed by the Nomenclature Board were resolutely rejected, and the Board has now acceded to those names given to the Franklin caves by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. Fraser has become Kutikina, meaning spirit. It remains to be seen whether the state and national government will succeed in their bid to destroy the spirit of the Tasmanian aborigines as effectively as they destroyed the society of those original Tasmanians whose home they have over-run.

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Figure 2: National Parks and Conservation Areas, 1981 with existing hydro-electric dams.



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### FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1: Limestone and dolomite outcrops in south-west Tasmania. Parks and reserves proclaimed prior to 1970 and two extension proposals of the mid 1970s are superimposed.

Rivers: C = Cracroft; D = Denison; F = Franklin; G = Gordon; H = Huon;  
O = Olga; S = Serpentine; W = Weld

Parks and Reserves: 1 Lake Pedder NP; 2 Port Davey Scenic Reserve;  
3 Hartz Mtns NP; 4 Mt. Field NP; 5 Lower Gordon River Scenic Reserve;  
6 Frenchmans Cap NP; 7 Lyell Highway Scenic Reserve; 8 Cradle Mtn-Lake  
St. Clair NP; 9 South West Fauna District; 10 South West Committee NP  
proposal; 11 United Tasmania Group NP proposal; 12 UTG extension area.

Figure 2: National Parks and Conservation Areas, 1981 with existing hydro-electric dams.

1 "South West National Park" (Lake Pedder NP, 1968); 2 Port Davey  
Extension (1976); 3 Precipitous Bluff and Southern Ranges Extension  
(1976); 4 Davey River Extension (1981); 5 Truchanas Huon Pine Reserve  
(1970); 6 Franklin-Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park (1981); 7 Exit  
Cave State Reserve (1979); 8 South-West Conservation Area (1980);  
9 Proposed Gordon-below-Franklin damsite.