



Sunday Tasmanian
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100 YEARS ON FROM WEINDORFER'S VISION

What's the next step for Cradle?

ROB INGLIS

STANDING at the summit of Cradle Mountain on January 4, 1910, Gustav Weindorfer examined the sublime landscape laid out before him.

With his wife, Kate, by his side, the awe-struck botanist declared: "This must be a national park for the people for all time. It is magnificent, and people must know about it and enjoy it."

Tasmanian Walking Company general manager Heath Garratt said the words of Weindorfer had stuck with him since he was a child.

"I've always had an affinity with him," the Burnie-born businessman said. "We went to the Gustav memorial days as kids and it was always a pretty special thing to be a part of."

The Weindorfers, pioneers of wilderness tourism in Tasmania, built a home and a guest chalet, called Waldheim (German for "forest home"), on crown land in the Cradle Valley in 1912.

One-hundred years ago, on May 16, 1922, an area of

63,943ha was gazetted as a

scenic reserve in the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair area, realising Weindorfer's dream from a decade earlier.

Boasting deep glacial lakes, primordial rainforests, imposing peaks, and vividly coloured alpine heathlands, the national park is a playground for nature-lovers.

From Dove Lake at the northern end to Mt Rufus in the south, the park offers an abundance of natural wonders.

The Tasmanian Walking Company runs guided walks in the area, including a six-day trek on the Overland Track.

Mr Garratt noted there was a "controversial element to what we do", but said he wanted the company to always stay true to Weindorfer's values, allowing people to enjoy the national park while also protecting it against the impacts of over-visitation.

"(Weindorfer) would be mortified if we were to get that wrong," he said. "It's a consideration we need to keep front of mind, making sure we get the balance right."

Of course, no one wants to protect the place more than



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the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

The Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair area is the country of the Big River tribe and holds immense cultural significance for the palawa people.

Sharnie Read, who works for the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre as a project facilitator for the rrala milaythina-ti/Strong In Country Project, leads community groups out on to country right across the island, including the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park.

"It's a space where we still connect to our old people and their old ways," Ms Read said of the area. "But it's a teaching

space for us, as well. Because those landscapes are actually really highly connected to a number of our creation stories.

"For instance, ballawinne, which is red ochre, the creation story of red ochre and the ability of us as a community right across lutruwita, right across the whole island, to have access to ochre comes from that country, comes from Big River country."

Ms Read said Tasmanian Aboriginal people should not be seen as mere stakeholders in the wilderness tourism debate, but instead be given an active role in the management

of wild places. The government's \$160m Cradle Mountain Master Plan, unveiled six years ago, was developed after interstate visitation to the area fell by 25 per cent in the five years to 2014-15.

The aim of the plan – the centrepiece of which is a cableway to Dove Lake – is to increase the number of visitors to the park by improving the tourism experience with further investment in infrastructure and the facilitation of private development opportunities.

An additional 58,600 annual visitors are expected to

flood into the place once the plan comes to fruition.

Tom Wootton, chief executive of regional tourism body West by North West, said he believed the vision for the future of Cradle Mountain was a responsible one.

"If this is to remain a 'park for the people', true to Weindorfer's vision, then it's perhaps less about shutting people out and more about carefully managing the number, flow and behaviour of visitors," Mr Wootton said.

But Greens leader Cassy O'Connor is of the view that the Liberals and "big tourism"

want to turn Cradle Mountain into a "Disneyland".

"A gimcrack cableway is anathema to the wildness of the place," Ms O'Connor said. "It's not too late for a rethink."

Parks Minister Jacquie Petrusma said the centenary of Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair being proclaimed a protected area was "an important milestone".

"Our key goal for the next 100 years is to continue to enhance the visitor experience, while also preserving and protecting this iconic location," Ms Petrusma said.

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Heath Garratt



Cradle Mountain over Dove Lake.
Picture: PWS



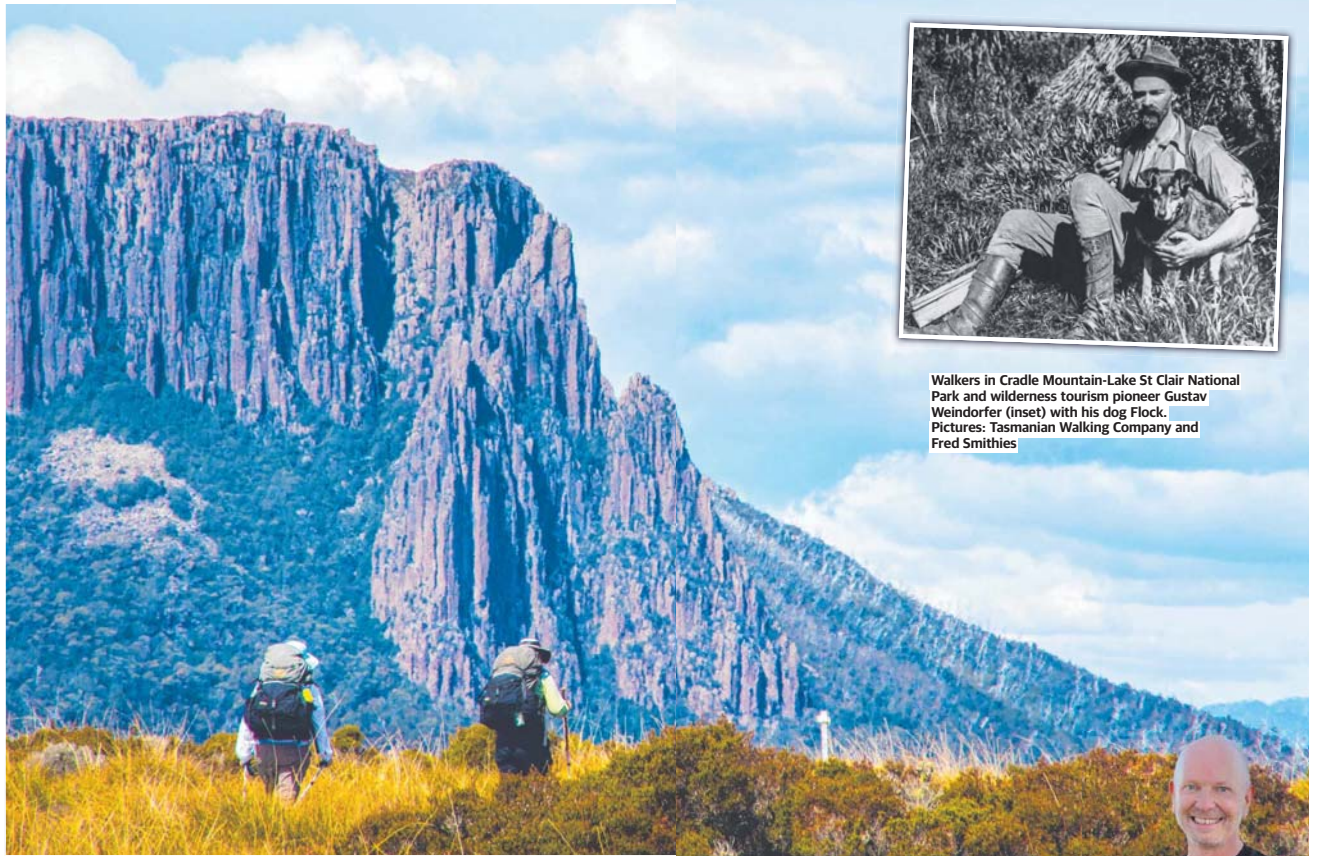
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Walkers in Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park and wilderness tourism pioneer Gustav Weindorfer (inset) with his dog Flock.
Pictures: Tasmanian Walking Company and Fred Smithies