



## SECTION I THE NORTH WEST

*Original essays by NIGEL RICHARDSON with updated essay contributions from CHARLES CHADWICK, DAVID GRIFFITHS, BECCA LUNNON, JIM MCLEOD, BEN WALTER, BILL WILKINSON, MARK WRIGHT and DAVID YOUNG*

St Valentines Peak	38	Mt Campbell	54
Mt Tor	40	Cradle Mtn	56
Black Bluff Range	42	Mt Emmett	60
Mt Beecroft	44	Barn Bluff	62
Recondite Knob	48	Mt Inglis	64
Brewery Knob	50	Mt Roland	66
Mt Kate	52		

◀ *The track to Barn Bluff* LUKE TSCHARKE▶ *An echidna* GRAHAM FLOWER*Snow gum detail* RICHARD ROMASZKO ▶

The mountains of the north west offer a wonderful variety of walking opportunities not surpassed anywhere else in Tasmania. While Mt Tor, Mt Emmett and Mt Inglis retain the challenge of being untracked, by contrast Cradle Mtn is surrounded by over 30km of tracks. Consequently the more remote Abels are less climbed, whereas thousands of people tackle Cradle Mtn each year.

The beautiful landscapes have their origins in some of the oldest rocks in Tasmania. The northernmost Abels such as Mt Roland, the Black Bluff Range and St Valentines Peak are almost entirely composed of conglomerate and sandstone of Ordovician origin. Further south the mountains are founded on even older, generally light-coloured, Precambrian quartzites, schists and pelitic rocks which form the summits of Mt Kate and the Cradle Plateau. Permian and Triassic sandstones underlie Barn Bluff and outcrop at the summit of Mt Inglis. About 165 million years ago these quartzites and sandstones were intruded by the dark, igneous dolerite and subsequent erosion has revealed the characteristic columnar formations of Cradle Mtn and Barn Bluff.

Just 24,000 years ago a colder climate caused glaciation which sculpted this bedrock into the scenic formations recognizable today. An ice cap developed around Cradle Mtn, and together with its outlet glaciers, smoothed and gouged the landscape. Only the highest peaks such as Cradle Mtn and Barn Bluff protruded above the ice as nunataks. Glaciers gouged basins which are now occupied by such beautiful lakes as Lake Will, Dove Lake and also Paddys Lake and Crater Lake.

The ice retreated about 12,000 years ago and Aboriginal hunter-gatherers probably moved into the grassy valleys and moorlands seeking game and sheltering in caves and overhangs.

The warming climate has since allowed the development of some unique vegetation on the thin acidic soils. The valleys of the four main rivers which drain the

area, the Pieman, Forth, Leven and Mersey provide the most sheltered sites which support tall eucalypts and rainforests. Buttongrass grows on the leached soils of the subalpine moors. Yellow gums, snow gums and peppermints grow on the better drained sites with the snow gums often extending into the alpine zone. Here, there is a profusion of summer-flowering plants, many endemic to Tasmania, including the lemon scented boronia, mountain rocket and the various richeas. Other alpine endemics found on fire-protected aspects include the King Billy pine and pencil pine and the deciduous beech, while on boggy sites cushion plants survive.

The climate is cool and wet; an annual average of 155 rainy days produce a median precipitation of 2800mm at Cradle Valley; in addition, the mountain often sits shrouded in rainless mist and the visitor is fortunate to see it in clear skies. The mountains are exposed to moisture-laden westerly winds which produce regular heavy precipitation. During winter there are deep banks of snow and some of the smaller lakes can freeze over. Although snow storms may occur at any time of the year, the weather is usually more settled in late summer and autumn.

The environment which confronted the early European explorers of this totally unknown area was challenging to say the least. In 1825 the Van Diemen's Land Company recruited several surveyors to locate grazing land. Henry Hellyer, supported by Joseph Fossey and Clement Lorymer, was destined to make some long and dangerous expeditions on the company's behalf.

The search for minerals prompted further exploration late in the 19th century, but it was not until early in the 20th century that these mountains began to receive wider acclaim for their natural beauty. Foremost in spreading the news of these magnificent mountain landscapes was Gustav Weindorfer.

This recognition reached its pinnacle with the proclamation of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area which includes over half the north western Abels.





## Cradle Mtn

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HEIGHT 1545m | ABEL 5 | TASMAP Sophia/Murchison/Cradle; 127847

TIME TO PEAK 3.5 hours | TRACK To summit | GRADE Medium

Originally known as Ribbed Rock, the name of Tasmania's world famous mountain was changed to Cradle Mtn in 1828 by Joseph Fossey because of the cradle-like pass between the summit ridge and Little Horn. Henry Hellyer is usually credited with the first ascent by a white man in 1831; however, CJ Binks in *Explorers of Western Tasmania*<sup>11</sup> provides a strong case to suggest that Fossey made the first ascent in 1828 when investigating the possibilities of a route from the Central Plateau to Surrey Hills, near St Valentines Peak. The man most associated with Cradle Mtn is Gustav Weindorfer, who fought for the preservation of this region. Weindorfer commenced the building of Waldheim Chalet in March 1912, and its construction was far enough advanced to accept its first visitors by Christmas of that year. So began a remarkable tradition whereby Weindorfer was able to entertain a wide variety of people and introduce them to the magnificent scenery of this wild, and at that time, remote region. For further information on Cradle Mtn and Weindorfer, Margaret Giordano's *A Man and a Mountain*<sup>14</sup> is recommended.

In Dr Bergman's book *Gustav Weindorfer of Cradle Mtn*, the early ascents of Cradle Mtn are listed. In summary, after Fossey and Hellyer, noted above, they are: 1854 James Sprent; 2 January 1891 W Weston, E Law and Richard Smith; 1898 C Packet; 1905 S Spurling, G Dodery, R & K Roberts and G Lithgow; 1907 Ronald Smith and C Rigg; 1908 Smith, Rigg and brothers G & R Adams and finally Weindorfer's party on 4 January 1910.<sup>15</sup> (The ascent made by E Innes in December 1896 was overlooked.)

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'This must be a National Park for the people for all time. It is magnificent, and people must know about it and enjoy it.'<sup>16</sup> So declared Gustav Weindorfer on 4 January

1910 as he stood on the summit of Cradle Mtn with arms outstretched, surveying the glorious views with his wife Kate, the first white woman to reach the top.



◀ *Cradle Mtn reflected in Dove Lake* IAN GREEN    *Cradle Mtn from Little Plateau in winter* PHILIP DAWSON    ▶

Weindorfer's vision for the future was inspired by one of the most beautiful mountains in the world. Seen from the northern end of Dove Lake, the receding lines of Hansons Peak and Marions Lookout appear to defer to the soaring fluted columns of the summit ridge, the exquisite curve of the cradle and the triangular peak of Little Horn. The change in name from Ribbed Rock to the infinitely more romantic Cradle Mtn more truly reflects this Abel's natural beauty.

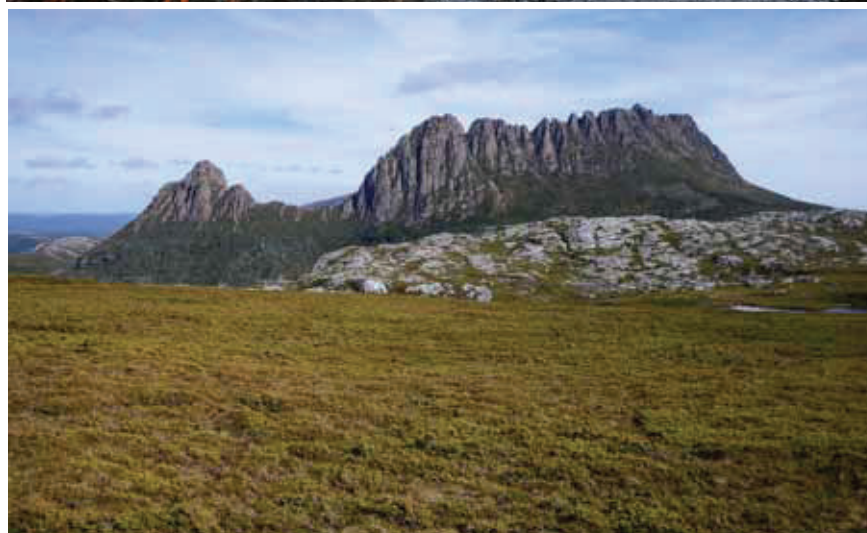
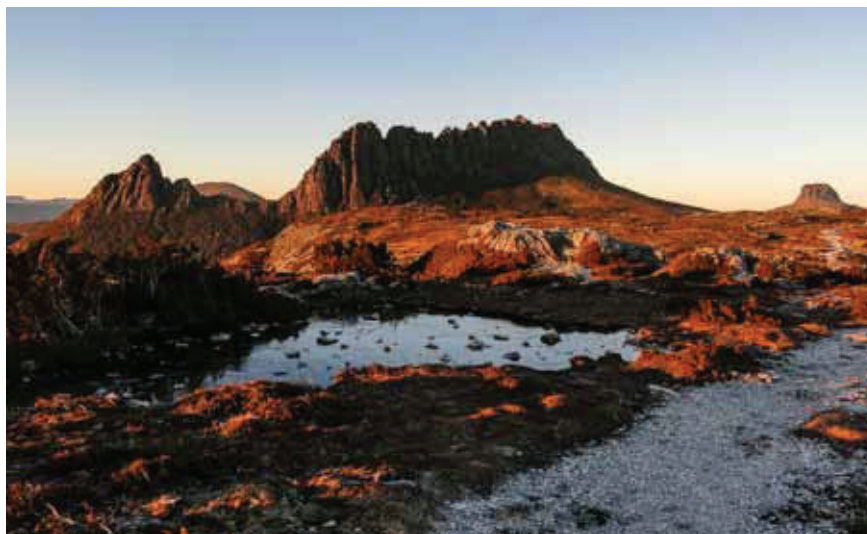
The climb to the summit can take a variety of attractive routes – this ascent is one of the finest walks that Tasmania has to offer. From the Ronny Creek carpark, reached by car or by using the shuttle bus, the Overland Track can be followed across the grassy floor of Cradle Valley towards Crater Creek, bypassing the right-forking Horse Track. A steeper ascent ensues and soon afterwards, Suttons Forest is entered and a delightful patch of this rainforest overhangs Crater Falls, forming a most enjoyable location. Two viewing platforms have been located beside the creek. The track then climbs to a boat shed on the shores of the aptly named Crater Lake. This 70m deep glacial lake is almost enclosed by 200m high quartzite walls which are swathed in deciduous beech, a wonderful sight in autumn.

From the boat shed the track then climbs below Wombat Peak to a small saddle where another track that passes Wombat Pool is encountered on the left. A brief steep climb then ensues as the top of Marions Lookout is attained. Glorious views unfold of Dove Lake, 300m below on one side, and Crater Lake, 200m below on the other. Marions Lookout and its surroundings are composed of Precambrian quartzites and some schists. At more than 800-1100 million years old these are some of the oldest rocks in Tasmania. By comparison, the dolerite cliffs of Cradle Mtn which rear above the Cradle Plateau only 2km away are a mere 175 million years old. Between the quartzites and the dolerite, layer-cake rocks are clearly visible, especially from Dove Lake. These rocks are Permian in age (260 – 290 million years old) and contain fossils. This is a typical geological cross section in this region.

The remainder of the walk now crosses more exposed terrain subject to adverse weather. The undulating track continues southwards across alpine heath and stark gravelly patches to Kitchen Hut, where the views of Cradle Mtn can only be described as majestic.

Shortly after the hut, turn left onto the Face Track for a few metres before continuing on the summit track. Despite the open wind-swept aspect, a rich variety of





- ▲▲ Late afternoon light, Cradle Mtn and Barn Bluff from the Overland Track ROHAN HUTCHINSON
- ▲ Cradle Mtn rising above the alpine gardens of Cradle Plateau PHILIP DAWSON
- ▶ Cradle Mtn Sunrise NICK FITZHARDINGE

shrubs covers the lower slopes of the mountain before gradually yielding to the rock scree. The ascent steepens and a number of large boulders need to be skirted. The cliffs tower overhead as the cairns lead to an opening where the track suddenly breaches the ridge. The track passes several tall, isolated columns before descending briefly to avoid some steep rock faces. A scramble completes the final 120m to the summit after 3.5 hours walking.

The views are superb. The impressive, towering presence of Barn Bluff makes a remarkable sight. Beyond the heathy tarn-studded Windermere Plains lie a cluster of the highest mountains in Tasmania, including

Mt Ossa and Mt Pelion West. Nearby, the cool waters of Lake Rodway lie quietly over 600m below, while on the opposite side the Fury River plunges into the dark, forested depths of Fury Gorge. Dove Lake, which complements Cradle Mtn so perfectly, is a beautiful sight while in the distance stands Mt Roland from where Weindorfer first gazed in fascination at Cradle Mtn.

In 1922, Weindorfer's dream of a national park was fulfilled and his vision was further vindicated in 1982 when Cradle Mtn was included in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

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