

# Cultural Change Or An Uneasy Truce?

## Forestry and Tourism in Geeveston, Southern Tasmania

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**Image 1: Tahune Airwalk, showing confluence of the Huon and Picton Rivers**

Source: Private collection

In recent years, forests and national parks have become valuable tourism attractions in many countries, including Australia, due to the downturn in forestry industries and the growth of nature-based tourism.<sup>1</sup> However, severe community tensions, social conflict, and even animosity frequently arise from the changing nature of the environment and land use. Problems might stem from differences in attitudes and values, lifestyle, and socio-cultural identities, resulting in a culture clash.<sup>2</sup> This can be of serious concern in small rural towns. One small rural town that experienced challenges arising from a clash of cultures was Geeveston, in southern Tasmania. To examine this quandary, this paper investigates the changes in economic resource usage from extractive forestry industries to nature-based tourism in Geeveston in the late twentieth century, culminating in 2001 with the establishment of a significant tourism attraction, the Tahune Airwalk.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 See for examples, Stephen Schweinsberg, Stephen Wearing and Simon Darcy, 'Understanding communities' views of nature in rural industry renewal: the transition from forestry to nature-based tourism in Eden, Australia.' *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol 20, 2012 p 195; J Fairweather and S Swaffield, 'Visitors' and locals' experiences of Rotorua, New Zealand: An interpretative study using photographs of landscapes and Q method', *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol 4, 2002, p 285; H Choi and I Murray, 'Resident attitudes towards sustainable community tourism', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol 18, 2010, p 575.
- 2 Michael Smith and Richard Krannich, 'Culture Clash Revisited: Newcomer and Longer-Term Residents' Attitudes Toward Land Use, Development and Environmental Issues in Rural Communities in the Rocky Mountain West', *Rural Sociology*, Vol 65, 2000, p 396.
- 3 'Tahune' is generally believed to be an Aboriginal word meaning 'peaceful place by running water', but the accuracy of this cannot be determined. 'Tahune' is listed in N J B Plomley, *Tasmanian Aboriginal Place Names*, Occasional Paper No 3, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, 1990, p 78, as *Tahune-Lunah* – the Aboriginal name for the Huon River.

In so doing, the paper tracks initial moves to re-classify state forests to World Heritage status and examines strategies adopted for managing and resolving the conflicts that threatened to devastate Geeveston. Anecdotal data gathered through face-to-face interviews and oral histories enable a contextualisation of the Geeveston community's valuing of nature within the myriad of social, economic and environmental issues facing the town, which were likely to affect its transition from rural forest industries to nature-based tourism industries. In addition, the paper explores some of the elements influencing environmental conflicts and considers why such conflicts tend to be prolonged and acrimonious. The key focus of the paper is to consider how—or indeed if—the people of Geeveston developed the capacity to effect cultural change in their attitudes to nature when faced with significant economic and employment pressures.

To understand why a culture clash might occur, it is useful first to consider the notion of 'culture' and its importance when discussing relationships between people and their environment. In a broad sense, culture is 'a dynamic mix of symbols, beliefs, languages, and practices that people create, not a fixed thing or entity governing humans'.<sup>4</sup> The inculcation of culture appears to happen throughout childhood, as children watch and listen, thereby adopting the culture and values of those around them.<sup>5</sup> The structures of daily life that tend to be taken for granted, or seen as natural, are understood to be products of culture. Head, Trigger, and Mulcock point out that all people have a culture of nature, in that they are socialised to think about land and natural species in particular ways, but these thoughts are also subject to human capacities to effect change over time.<sup>6</sup> However, the changing of cultural values—especially cultures of nature—can be a difficult and protracted process.<sup>7</sup> This is because cultures of nature are unusually durable and unyielding, and may be carried across different contexts and time frames. Consequently, divergent cultures of nature in communities can—and frequently do—lead to conflict over land management decisions, with landscapes under discussion often characterised as contested.<sup>8</sup> When examining the cultural identity of Geeveston, it was expected that, like other rural areas, there would be an abundance of different spiritual and cultural values and identities amongst community members.<sup>9</sup>

For this investigation, an invitation to be interviewed was extended to individuals connected with the local Geeveston Historical Society, who then circulated details to their membership group. Other key stakeholders were individually approached. Residents from all sectors of the Geeveston community eventually participated in the interviews. Some of these were former and current loggers or foresters, while others were

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4 Kay Anderson and Fay Gale, 'Introduction', in Kay Anderson and Fay Gale (eds) *Inventing Places: Studies in Cultural Geography*, Melbourne, 1992, p 3.

5 Nicola Johnson, 'Bourdieu Section—Habitus', 2006. Accessed 5 December 2012 at <http://academic.treatise.blogspot.com/2006/02/bourdieu-section-habitus.html>, n.p.; J Noble, 'The delicate and noxious scrub: CSIRO studies on native trees and shrub proliferation in the semi-arid woodlands of eastern Australia', Canberra, 1997, p 10.

6 Lesley Head, David Trigger and Jane Mulcock, 'Culture as Concept and Influence in Environmental Research and Management', *Conservation and Society*, Vol 3, 2005, p 252.

7 Jen Webb, Tony Schirato and Geoff Danaher, *Understanding Bourdieu*, London, 2002, p 114.

8 Anderson and Gale, *Inventing Places*, p 255.

9 Allen Putney, 'Introduction: Perspectives on the values of protected areas', in D Harmon and A Putney (eds), *The Full Value of Parks: From Economics to the Intangible*, Lanham, 2003, p 3.

business people or townsfolk. Some had spent their entire working lives in the extractive forestry industry in the area, while others had links with environmental organisations opposing the forestry management. Interviewees had lived for varying lengths of time in Tasmania's Huon Valley. Participants were able to contribute a range of perspectives, interests, experiences and land use perceptions. Interviewees are given pseudonyms to provide an ethically sound yet personal and intimate presentation of the discussions. *Table 1* provides details of the cohort.

**Table 1: Interview participants**

Pseudonym	Status
Layton	Geeveston resident, businessman
Sandra	Geeveston resident, businesswoman
Don	Geeveston resident, retired professional
Martin	Geeveston resident, businessman
Richard	Former Forestry Tasmania executive
Ellen	Long-term Geeveston resident, retired
Lorraine	Long-term Geeveston resident, retired

**Images 2 and 3: Large decorated tree trunks welcome visitors to Geeveston, 'Forest Town'.** Source: Private collection



Self-identifying as a 'Forest Town', Geeveston is situated an hour south of Hobart, deep in the Huon Valley. It was settled by Europeans in 1842. With Tasmania's famous Southern Forests right on Geeveston's doorstep, it is no wonder that the town's cultural persona and economic fortunes have always been linked with forestry, as for nearly 100 years the Southern Forests supplied sawmills in the area. A key stakeholder in the history of Geeveston is the government business, Forestry Tasmania (FT, formerly the Forestry Commission).<sup>10</sup>

During the 1960s, Tasmania was regarded as something of an economic basket-case. The state's economic woes were characterised by service sector growth, manufacturing decline, loss of rural employment and a failed mining boom.<sup>11</sup> Causes of these problems were linked to the fact that Tasmania is a small island state, and therefore suffered special disabilities and costs in transport. Economic difficulties were exacerbated by Tasmania's small population size and the high out-migration rate of fifteen to twenty-four year olds. Regional communities were dependent on extractive and energy-intensive industries, particularly mining, metal refining, and forestry.<sup>12</sup> As these regions are on the state's peripheries, they significantly contributed to the strain placed on the state in the provision of services and facilities to its decentralised population.

Forestry Commission activities provided significant employment for the state's regional areas. Statistics show a steady increase in direct forestry manufacturing employment figures, from 2,631 in 1969 to a peak of 8,279 (or 5% of the state's total workforce) in 1974. Total forest-based employment in the state remained steady with 11,943 people employed in forestry-related jobs in 1968, and 10960 (or 6.6% of the state's total workforce) in 1975.<sup>13</sup> In the South East region, centred on Geeveston and including the municipalities of Esperance and Huon, the largest forest employer was Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd (APM), and from 1962 onwards, the APM mill at Port Huon employed nearly 400 people from the area.<sup>14</sup> The main forest product was pelletized pulp with some sawn timber.

The other major activity in the Huon Valley was the apple industry, which for years provided employment for many locals. But in the 1970s trouble was brewing, and when England joined the European Common Market in 1973, the death knell was sounded for the apple industry. There was little warning, and the export market disappeared virtually overnight. Before long so many growers were in financial difficulties that the

10 The Tasmanian Forestry Department was established in 1921 and operated until 1946 when it became the Forestry Commission. The Commission was restructured in 1994, and renamed Forestry Tasmania, with a further restructure in 2016. Now known as Sustainable Timber Tasmania, the organisation continues to manage Tasmania's state (or public) forests.

11 MaryAnn McCuaig and Philip Hoysted, 'Socio-Economic Aspects of the Export Woodchip Industry in Tasmania', M Env St thesis, University of Tasmania, 1983, p 2.

12 McCuaig and Hoystedt, 'Socio-Economic Aspects', p 32.

13 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1974-1981; Australian Year Book; 1975-76, Canberra. Accessed 30 March 2018 at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/13246E82504D3C3BCA2573AA0003BBD3?opendocument>.

14 Kenneth Duus, *Aussie Towns: Geeveston, Tas* [Online], 2017. Accessed 2 September 2017 at <http://www.aussietowns.com.au/town/geeveston-tas> [],n.p. These figures here are disputed by Young, who asserts that at its peak the mill employed only 170 people. See John Young, *Trivialised by Forestry Tasmania, 2006*. Accessed 1 March 2018 at <http://www.tasmaniantimes.com/index.php/article/john-young-forestry.n.p>. Nevertheless it was a major source of employment in the area.

Tasmanian Government was forced to sponsor ‘The Tree Pull Scheme’. From 1972 until 1975 many Huon Valley farmers took advantage of this scheme. In over a decade almost seven hundred orchards were shut down.<sup>15</sup>

Since British occupation Australia’s forests have been characterised by a history of contestation and conflict.<sup>16</sup> From the early 1970s until about the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century these conflicts were largely between conservationists and foresters, and focused on the management of native forests. The so-called ‘Forest Wars’ were initiated by the large-scale clear-felling of native forests for conversion to pine plantations, for processing as export woodchips, or for both. This period was a catalyst for a ‘Fight for the Forest’ that continues today.<sup>17</sup> The battle in Terania Creek in New South Wales in 1979 is an early exemplar. In that instance, the NSW Forestry Commission wanted to log the timber in the area as part of its regional harvesting plan, but protesters wanted to preserve the forested landscape because of its innate beauty and the connection they felt with its life forms.<sup>18</sup>

In Tasmania in the 1970s, the burgeoning environmental movement was making waves. The South-West Action Committee that formed in Hobart in 1974 (after the flooding of Lake Pedder)—which later became the Wilderness Society (1976)—focused attention on the World Heritage outstanding universal values of Tasmania’s Southern Forests, then mostly unprotected. In 1982, the then Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park, Franklin–Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park and Southwest National Park were inscribed on the World Heritage List as the Western Tasmania Wilderness National Parks World Heritage Area, an area of 769,355 hectares.<sup>19</sup> In 1989, an enlarged area, known as the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), was accepted for inclusion on the World Heritage List—a listing that incorporated the 1982 property and further expanded the area to cover almost 20 per cent of Tasmania.<sup>20</sup>

By the mid-1970s the domestic effects of the world recession, coupled with high interest rates, induced the worst slump in the forestry industry since the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup> The 1980s began with a brief revival. At that time the Port Huon APM mill used approximately 200,000 tonnes of pulp-wood annually.<sup>22</sup> However, ownership and management external to the state resulted in a large quantity of unprocessed woodchips, as well as pulp and rough sawn timber, being shipped overseas and to other Australian states for further manufacture and value-adding.<sup>23</sup> The onset of a national recession

15 Beth Hall, ‘Apples of the Huon – Part Two’, *Tasmanian Geographic*, 2014, p 1. Accessed 2 September 2017 at <https://tasmaniangeographic.com/apples-of-the-huon-part-two/>.

16 Peter J Kanowski, ‘Australia’s Forests: Contested Past, Tenure-driven Present, Uncertain Future,’ *Forest Policy and Economics*, Vol. 77, 2017, p 56.

17 Kanowski, ‘Australia’s Forests’, p 58; John Dargavel, *Fashioning Australia’s Forests*. Melbourne, 1995.

18 Nigel Turvey, *Terania Creek: Rainforest Wars*, Brisbane, 2006, p 23.

19 Commonwealth of Australia. *The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. World Heritage Committee Decision WHC-06/30.COM/7B State Party Report*. 2007, p 9. Accessed 1 March 2018 at <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/63307db8-6b28-44d8-807b-6979eeab9a41/files/tas-wilderness.pdf>.

20 Ibid.

21 Ian Watson, *Fighting over the Forests*, North Sydney, 1990, p 5.

22 McCuaig and Hoysted, ‘Socio-Economic Aspects’, p 4.

23 McCuaig and Hoysted, ‘Socio-Economic Aspects’, p 29.

in 1982 plunged the forestry industry back into a slump.<sup>24</sup> Without notice, the APM pulp mill closed, with owners citing a downturn in overseas markets. Timber-dependent Geeveston was shocked.<sup>25</sup> The mill briefly re-opened in 1988, giving locals some renewed hopes for employment, but after only six months it closed permanently, due to volatile prices, the falling Australian dollar, lack of domestic markets and obsolete technology, as by now, few overseas mills could use the pulp.<sup>26</sup> Geeveston's already dire situation worsened. In fact, in the words of one resident: 'it was devastating, really devastating. Geeveston was almost a ghost town ... we were in trouble'.<sup>27</sup> Unemployment rates skyrocketed with youth unemployment reaching 35-40%. Young people left the town in droves to find employment and security elsewhere.<sup>28</sup>

Spurred on by the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage listing, conservationists looked to achieve protection for the Southern Forests. They commenced a strident campaign against the Tasmanian forestry industry. From their perspective, enclosing forests within the boundaries of national parks was the only guarantee that endangered areas would be protected from insatiable extractive industries. According to Ian Watson, this represented the embodiment of the 'disinterested altruism' of middle-class activities.<sup>29</sup> Establishing national parks would 'rescue precious resources for future generation from greedy capitalists, short sighted unionists, venal politicians and environmentally abusive farmers'.<sup>30</sup>

Not surprisingly this was not how the loggers and foresters saw the situation. As Watson explains, in regions with little economic diversity, manual workers are highly vulnerable to the loss of their livelihood.<sup>31</sup> For timber workers, there is little prospect of them transferring to other local growth areas, especially in activities like tourism. Consequently, their job security is dependent on the timber industry restructuring in such a way that their existing skills might be enhanced.<sup>32</sup> Many of the timber workers in the Southern Forests had limited formal education, thriving in the rough, hard lifestyle of the bush for most if not all of their working lives. This gave them a distinct masculine identity, one that did not take kindly to the degrees, diplomas and certificates of the (often) city-based protesters. And so the battle lines were drawn.

The issue in Tasmania's Southern Forests was somewhat different to that in Terania Creek. In Tasmania it was ostensibly wood chipping (albeit lucrative) and the export of wood chips to Japan that caused the ire of conservationists. The majority of the woodchips were sourced from the richly biodiverse eucalypt forests, such as the Southern Forests. Conservationists saw wood chipping as indiscriminate forest clearing

24 Watson, *Fighting over the Forests*, p 5.

25 Pip Courtney, 'Positive approach regenerates timber town.' *Landline*. Australian Broadcasting Commission 2004, p 1. Accessed 2 August 2017 at <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/landline/old-site/content/2004/s1181101.htm>.

26 Wayne Smith, 'Pulp and Paper Mill at Geeveston.' *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Hobart, 2006, p 1.

27 Dudley Geeves cited in Pip Courtney. 'Positive approach', p 1.

28 Don, Geeveston resident, retired professional, personal communication (hereafter pers com).

29 Watson, *Fighting over the Forests*, p 123.

30 Ibid.

31 Watson, *Fighting over the Forests*, pp 60-1

32 Ibid.

and exploitation, and heated battles between loggers and conservationists transpired.<sup>33</sup> The Picton River, within the South-West Wilderness area, was traditionally an obstacle for loggers. When a bridge was built over the lower reaches of the river in 1977, another vast coupe was opened for clear-felling.<sup>34</sup> Disputes escalated and were depicted in the media as forest wars between the forces of a modern, rational, progressive development versus an irrational, emotional, anti-development resistance,<sup>35</sup> or more simply as a battle between the city-based proponents of the environment and the rural-based proponents of employment.<sup>36</sup>

By 1983 additional areas of Tasmania's forests had been added to the Federal Register of the National Estate. Tensions increased as conservationists and industry argued over preservation of these areas. In 1986 a Memorandum of Understanding was negotiated between the Federal and State governments, suggesting that ongoing issues might be resolved. However, by the end of that year, the problems had reached a climax. Subsequently, the Commonwealth government established the Helsham Inquiry to examine the Lemonthyme (in the north) and Southern Forests for potential World Heritage outstanding universal values. The Commonwealth enacted legislation as interim protection for the forests while the Inquiry took place.

As well as its aim to identify areas of World Heritage significance and report on their existence, the Helsham Inquiry included consideration of the economic and environmental effects of discontinuing logging operations in the forests.<sup>37</sup> The Commission received submissions from industry, private citizens, and organisations, as well as reports from consultants.<sup>38</sup> Many submissions were highly emotive, some relied on exaggerations and embellishments, and others presented personal economic imperatives. Beekeepers, for example, merely wanted to maintain access to the forests for their honey production: 'not a lot of Eucalypt is present in this area', they claimed, 'so let us retain a very good example of rainforest with a leatherwood understory'.<sup>39</sup>

The Hobart Walking Club was effusive in its argument for World Heritage listings, gushing: 'these areas contain superlative natural phenomena of exceptional beauty included in sweeping vistas covered by natural vegetation'.<sup>40</sup> The Forest Resources and Environment Collective worried over the possible destruction of Aboriginal cultures: 'Aboriginal occupation sites exist in Wedge Block (...) It is possible that the area

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33 Tom Griffiths, 'How many trees make a forest? Cultural debates about vegetation change in Australia', *Australian Journal of Botany*, Vol 50 No 4, 2002, p 382.

34 Helen Gee, *For the Forests - Introduction* [Online], 2015. Accessed 22 August 2017 at <https://www.wilderness.org.au/articles/forests-introduction-ctd> [], np.

35 Couze Venn, *The Postcolonial Challenge: Towards Alternative Worlds*, London, 2006, p 138.

36 Turvey, *Terania Creek*, p 5.

37 Humphrey Elliott, Ken Felton, Jean Jarman, and Martin Stone. *A History of Innovation: Eighty-five Years of Research and Development at Forestry Tasmania*, Hobart, 2008, p 310.

38 Department of Agriculture, *Tasmania Social and Economic Report*, Hobart, 2000. Accessed 17 August 2017 at [http://www.agriculture.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/rfa/regions/tas/social-economic/TAS\\_Social\\_and\\_Economic\\_Report.pdf](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/rfa/regions/tas/social-economic/TAS_Social_and_Economic_Report.pdf), p 5.

39 Golden Pearl Honey (Submission by Hedley Hoskinson), Submission to Commission of Inquiry into the Lemonthyme and Southern Forests, Launceston, 1987.

40 The Hobart Walking Club Inc, Preliminary Submission to Commission of Inquiry into the Lemonthyme and Southern Forests, Launceston, 1987.

contains evidence of the oldest human habitation on Earth'.<sup>41</sup> Other submissions were just plain dubious. A Gunns Timber subsidiary submission maintained that the forests constituted 'cultural heritage' because road-building, mining, and logging had occurred 'for a considerable time'. And anyway, it suggested, for thousands of years Aborigines had hunted in and fired the forest. Logging and reforestation would, it argued, continue this tradition of cultural intervention. Thus, as a 'natural' forest was actually artificial, further preservation of forest areas was unwarranted.<sup>42</sup>

Public inquiries such as the Helsham Inquiry are often strategies utilised by governments to enhance participatory approach and maximise public participation, especially in situations where public interest concerns may be awkward, protracted or controversial. Inquiries are designed as 'springboards' for government decision-making. However, unlike a court of law, an Inquiry generally acts as a fact-finding agent for government, and so any conclusions or recommendations reached are not binding on government. Often, the most likely area of concern of a public inquiry arises in respect of the decisions made by government following the Inquiry, as final decisions may well prove to be political.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, this was the case for the Helsham Inquiry.

The Helsham Inquiry delivered an interim report in 1987 and a final report in May 1988. It concluded that a small proportion of the Inquiry area (10%) met the criteria of the World Heritage Convention, or would contribute to those areas adjacent to existing World Heritage areas. Yet, according to some commentators, the recommendations of the Inquiry were virtually ignored by the Federal Government.<sup>44</sup> Understandably vexed after delving through eighteen hefty volumes of submissions, Mr. Justice Helsham remonstrated:

Such commissions were not much use in resolving resource exploitation problems ... such inquiries and commissions were not set up to resolve conflict or assist in decision-making, but to defer decision-making so that politicians could defer the matter until it had lost its urgency or could otherwise be neutralised.<sup>45</sup>

What Justice Helsham was implying was that, rather than accepting the Inquiry's findings as presented, they were over-ruled by political expediency. This was a highly controversial outcome, and what followed was a lengthy period of argument and negotiation between the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments about areas to be protected, the agreed compensation and other conditions. Subsequent political decisions resulted in some 275,000ha being added to the existing World Heritage area

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41 Forest Resources And Environment Collective (Submission by Tim Morris and Peter Gillies), Preliminary Submission to Commission of Inquiry into the LEMONTHYME and Southern Forests, Launceston, 1987.

42 Gunns Kildried Timber Industries (Submission by Brendan A Lyons), Submission to Commission of Inquiry into the LEMONTHYME and Southern Forests, Launceston, 1987; Tom Griffiths, *Forests of Ash: An Environmental History*, Cambridge, 2001, p 178.

43 Edward Christie, *Finding Solutions for Environmental Conflicts: Power and Negotiation*, Cheltenham, 2008, p 48.

44 See for example, Christie, *Finding Solutions*, p 48.

45 Reporter, 'Report on Helsham Inquiry', *The Mercury*, 27 March 1990, p 3.



and thus becoming unavailable to commercial forestry.<sup>46</sup> Other areas were protected under State legislation.

The financial compensation provided to Tasmania from the Commonwealth was a \$50m package. However, the people of Geeveston were left confounded. Throughout all these machinations the town was virtually overlooked and was itself fast becoming a millstone around the neck of the Huon Valley—a depressed community with no obvious future. Deputy Mayor Laurie Dillon described the predicament facing the town: ‘the Helsham Inquiry took two-thirds of the Southern Forests away from forestry. That took away the investment opportunities and what we hoped for was a resurgence in forestry that was lost to us’.<sup>47</sup>

Don, a local retired professional, recalled: ‘Everything was finishing closing up, shops closed down, the council moved to Huonville, the mill closed down, and the bread factory closed down. It was awful’.<sup>48</sup> Even the town’s banks closed, noted another resident:

We had three banks in the main street of Geeveston there back in the day when the APM was open. And Laurie Dillon said look we’ve got to have a bank, otherwise people are going to go out of town for everything. It was nearly the end, yeah.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, ‘for a million dollars you would have bought the whole of Geeveston real estate. It was just ... yeah, it was rock bottom’.<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that the idea of tourism was not entirely new to the Geeveston area. A report in 1983 mentioned ‘little tourism development in [the local government area of] Esperance [other than the Hastings Caves]’.<sup>51</sup> Two hotels, one in Dover, the other opposite the pulp mill at Port Huon, rely largely on local custom’.<sup>52</sup> Yet at that time 68% of Esperance people believed tourism had potential for future expansion, a feeling of confidence said to be ‘considerably higher than people’s confidence in other local industries’.<sup>53</sup> Evidently, the downturn in the area’s extractive primary industries was already biting.

Strategies to overcome the community’s problems were urgently needed. One such strategy was to create tourism assets. Commonwealth funding allowed for some modest improvements to existing infrastructure. Collaboration between local and state governments led to the conversion of the now disused Town Hall and Council Chambers to a Visitors’ Centre designed to celebrate the natural values of Huon district, including its rich timber heritage.<sup>54</sup> As lead agency in negotiations, FT embarked on

46 Elliott et al., *A History of Innovation*, p 310.

47 Laurie Dillon cited in Courtney, ‘Positive approach’, p 1.

48 Don, Geeveston resident, retired professional, pers com. A large independent bakery was set up in Geeveston 1974/75. At its peak it provided employment for up to 400 locals, mainly women. It was sold in 1986 and closed two years later.

49 Ellen, long-term Geeveston resident, retired, pers com.

50 Layton, Geeveston resident, businessman, pers com.

51 In 1993 the municipalities of Esperance, Huon and Port Cygnet were amalgamated to form the Huon Valley Council. In current tourism parlance, Geeveston, Dover, and areas further south are referred to as the ‘Far South’.

52 McCuaig and Hoysted, ‘Socio-Economic Aspects’, p 181.

53 McCuaig and Hoysted, ‘Socio-Economic Aspects’, p 182.

54 Richard, former Forestry Tasmania executive, pers com.

developing tourist attractions along the FT-owned and maintained Arve Road, including interpretation facilities, short forest walks, viewing platforms, and rest areas. Significant old growth trees such as the Arve Big Tree were featured. However, as Richard, former FT executive, explained:

It was quite clear that unless we developed some really iconic infra structure even that trail wouldn't be enough. Again FT took the lead role with council and the mayor and council members agreed that we would look at getting a call for EOI to construct new facilities out at Tahune.<sup>55</sup>

Suddenly there was talk of a major tourism development. The idea of building an airwalk was mooted. Similar canopy walk structures had certainly proved to be popular tourism drawcards throughout forested areas of Australia. Lamington National Park claims to have the first of these in Australia, built in 1988. The Daintree Canopy Tower and Aerial Walk opened in 1989, and in 1996, the Tree Top Walk opened in the Valley of the Giants in south west Western Australia. As well as spectacular birds-eye views, some of these operations offered information centres, educational guides, cantilevered sections, zipline experiences, and bird-watching opportunities. The *Sunday Tasmanian* reported that this idea started as:

a dream that began on the banks of the Huon River at least three years ago, over a bottle of wine produced in the Huon Valley. {Huon Mayor] Greg Norris, [FT managing director] Evan Rolley, and Huon District Forest Manager John Traill were discussing the region, its problems and its future. 'It was one of those languid, autumn afternoons,' Mr Rolley said. ... I don't think any one person could take credit for the idea. We all had input.<sup>56</sup>

In late 1997 the plan was revealed publicly and the State Government announced that a \$4.5 million forest airwalk would be built on the Huon River at Tahune.<sup>57</sup> Funding would be sourced from the Commonwealth financial compensation package. Then Forestry Minister Paul Lennon explained:

People would be able to walk through the treetops of the forests that people around the country had been hotly debating for decades ... we wanted to create a link between a new industry of tourism, which we believed had the potential to flourish in the region and this great giant of forestry which had supported the community for 150 years ... we linked the two deliberately, to settle the score once and for all that forestry and tourism could work closely together and that both industries could thrive.<sup>58</sup>

Nascent tourism enterprises had existed for some time in the area and between 4,000 and 5,000 visitors per year visited Tahune.<sup>59</sup> At that stage, all that was there was

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55 Ibid.

56 Richard Cranny, 'Mayor's Dream comes true'. The *Sunday Tasmanian* 1 July 2001, p T04.

57 Harriet Binet, '\$3.1m bid to triple tourism for Huon Bold plan to build tree canopy walkway', *The Mercury*, 14 July 2000, p 5.

58 Paul Lennon cited in Courtney, 'Positive approach', p 5.

59 Richard, former Forestry Tasmania executive, pers com.

a stone structure which provided shelter for campers and picnickers, plus the bridge, the river, and trees. But not just any trees, these were huge, exotic, rainforest trees, 'ancient daughters of nature and time',<sup>60</sup> myrtle, sassafras, leatherwood and celery-top pine, 'extraordinary, exquisite trees, many centuries old, some of which could be found nowhere else'.<sup>61</sup> The Huon pine, for example, is Australia's oldest living tree and one of the oldest living organisms on earth. Individual trees have even been known to live for 3,000 years.<sup>62</sup>

The proposals for the Tahune Airwalk were on the same grand scale as the trees. Initial plans included walkways of twenty to forty-eight metres above the ground. The walk would be nearly 600 metres long and able to sustain the weight of 120 people on a cantilevered section overlooking the confluence of the Huon and Picton Rivers.<sup>63</sup> Plans included river kayaking, swimming bridges, a glider, tracks, trails and eventually basic accommodation. In all, the Tahune Airwalk promised a unique opportunity to experience life in the canopies of the huge trees. Mayor Greg Norris found it hard to contain his enthusiasm but suggested things were so promising that his ratepayers may be 'sick to the guts of tourism' in ten years' time.<sup>64</sup>

With the announcement of these plans the community spirits lifted. As a major tourism boost for the area, the development was projected to triple visitor numbers to the Huon Valley within five years. Annual visitor numbers were expected to swell from an initial 35,000 visitors to 50,000 within the first year and to 100,000 in five years. In fact, Greg Norris said the region was likely to 'explode' with the creation of up to 150 direct and indirect jobs.<sup>65</sup> On a cautionary note, Greens MHA Peg Putt warned that continued logging in areas of the Southern Forests would jeopardise the tourism development, stating: 'Continued business-as-usual forest destruction and confronting tourists with an array of offensive logging as currently exhibited is unacceptable and would harm our international reputation and the visitor experience'.<sup>66</sup>

From the locals, the initial reaction was not promising; in fact, 'the old truck drivers, the old loggers, working out in the bush, they thought this tourism idea was codswallop', stated Sandra, a Geeveston businesswoman.<sup>67</sup> 'Codswallop' it may have been for some. Others felt a deep hurt and a loss of identity in the way their town was being forced to change. Lorraine, whose husband had worked most of his lifetime in the Huon as a logging contractor, commented poignantly:

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60 Francois Peron cited in Bushwalk Australia. '700 Metres', [Online], np. Accessed 15 August 2017 at <http://bushwalk.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=2384&start=30>.

61 Richard Flanagan, 'Out of Control: The Tragedy of Tasmania's Forests', *The Monthly*, May 2007, pp 20-31.

62 Tasmania Parks And Wildlife, 'Plants: Huon Pine.' Hobart, 2010, p 2. Accessed 14 August 2017 at <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=6575>.

63 Tahune Airwalk Tasmania, *Tahune Airwalk*, Tahune, 2017, np. Accessed 14 August 2017 at <http://tahuneairwalk.com.au/activities/tahune-airwalk/>.

64 Ibid.

65 Binet, '\$3.1m bid to triple tourism for Huon, p 5.

66 Ibid.

67 Sandra, Geeveston resident, businesswoman, pers com.

It still bears a lot of hurt for a lot of older people. I lived here for years, my kids went to school here. I've never lived out of here you know. I've never been out of Tasmania. And it all made us feel worthless—that everything we had worked for was being taken away. And we weren't needed.<sup>68</sup>

Nature-based tourism is often conceived as being a more environmentally, economically and socially sustainable use of rural Australia's unique natural environments than conventional primary industries.<sup>69</sup> Although nature-based tourism creates a less extractive relationship with the natural environment than does logging, traditional primary industries may be closely connected to the social and economic sustainability of a rural community, as well as to the culture of the residents.<sup>70</sup> So for Geeveston, a move to nature-based tourism development would likely entail a fundamental re-organisation of the community's economic and social structures, but, most importantly, of the culture of its people, along with the inevitable potential for community tensions and conflict. In hindsight, were these tensions and conflict really inevitable? Tourism development involving the changing use of the environmental resources has been described by Simpson as:

a destroyer of culture, undermining social norms and economies, degrading social structures, stripping communities of individuality; [but also] as a saviour of the poor and disadvantaged, providing opportunities and economic benefits, promoting social exchange and enhancing livelihoods.<sup>71</sup>

In Geeveston it was unclear if the development of a nature-based tourism operation in a state forest would prove to be a 'destroyer of culture' or a 'saviour of the disadvantaged'. No doubt the development of a substantial and sustainable nature-based tourism attraction such as the Tahune Airwalk, in an area historically characterised by extractive forestry operations, would require the project managers—local and state governments, and FT—to reconcile a number of competing notions. These included tradition or modernity, economic development or environmental protection, and service sector development or primary-industry development.<sup>72</sup> These concepts are well illustrated here by retiree Ellen, a long-term Geeveston resident:

tourism was something that they [the loggers] never really grew up with. They always just went to work when it was dark and got home when it was dark. And then they was either playing footy or at your local sporting club of a weekend, then back to work Monday morning. So tourism and probably even holidaying was not even something that a lot of these guys did. If they did it was camping at Cockle Creek to get crays or fish. So to expect these guys to even understand what tourism meant, let alone participate in it, it was never going to work.<sup>73</sup>

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68 Lorraine, long-term Geeveston resident, retired, pers com.

69 Schweinsberg et al., 'Understanding communities', p 195.

70 Ibid.

71 Murray Simpson, 'Community benefit tourism initiatives - A conceptual oxymoron', *Tourism Management*, Vol 29, 2007, p 1.

72 Schweinsberg et al., 'Understanding communities', p 196.

73 Ellen, long-term Geeveston resident, retired, pers com.

Acknowledging the diverse cultures of nature of the different stakeholder groups, achievement of any reconciliation seemed unlikely. Solutions would involve attitudinal, behavioural and (especially) cultural change. Outward changes to the town started to appear in the early 1990s. Local personality, Dick Geeves, described an early transformation within Geeveston as the 'Green Jackets' group emerged. This was a band of some forty volunteers, which formed to share local stories and tales to visitors.<sup>74</sup> In a swipe at environmentalists, Geeves explained how the group chose its name: 'we called ourselves the Green Jackets ... well obviously green, the 'Greens' didn't have a licence on green. We reckoned we were green too'.<sup>75</sup>

In the absence of young jobseekers and white-collar professionals who had left town in search of employment, the 'Green Jackets' embarked on a makeover of the streetscape of the 'ugly, depressed town'.<sup>76</sup> The older people worked to tidy the streets, paint the shops, plant garden beds and convert a nearby overrun orchard to a Heritage Park. These were early signs of a transition from tradition to modernity, which began even before the airwalk was built. Yet on its own, this was not enough to persuade the majority of the townsfolk to change their 'taken for granted' attitudes and beliefs to embrace tourism as their sole new direction, and, as already mentioned, many had earned their living for years in logging. Their theory was: 'how the hell do I sell lavender bags in a tourist shop? Or make coffee? I'm not a barista'.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, economic development was desperately needed, and, indeed, the community was 'grasping at straws at the time'.<sup>78</sup>

Business people noted how the building of the Tahune Airwalk was a saviour for the town, and many locals found their livelihoods were enhanced directly by increased employment, or indirectly, as older community enterprises found a new lease of life. Morale improved and spirits started to lift. Specialist tradesmen from out of town needed board and lodgings in the community, and, noted Geeveston businessman Martin, suddenly the 'pub' became a focal point for social exchange: 'the pub made money; the guys lifted the pub. The riggers stayed there. They stayed there; they ate there; they got to know the locals. So it not only gave us work, it gave the town morale ... it became a social hub'.<sup>79</sup> For businesswoman Sandra, there were immediate opportunities and benefits for her business:

The airwalk was a saviour. If Geeveston didn't have the airwalk ... But it did us for the whole duration of the erection of the airwalk—our business worked seven days a week. We worked shift work with our fellas. We worked around the clock.<sup>80</sup>

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74 Sally Dakis, 'Outside broadcast from Geeveston', *ABC Rural Tasmania*, 2007, p 1. Accessed 15 August 2017 at <http://www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/tas/content/2006/s1871636.htm>.

75 Dick Geeves cited in Courtney, 'Positive approach', p 2.

76 Ibid.

77 Sandra, Geeveston resident, businesswoman, pers com.

78 Layton, Geeveston resident, businessman, pers com.

79 Martin, Geeveston resident, businessman, pers com.

80 Sandra, Geeveston resident, businesswoman, pers com.

The opening of the Tahune Airwalk was greeted with acclaim. Speaking at the opening, Tourism Tasmania chief executive Rob Giason said Tasmania had the perfect environment to capitalise on nature tourism and the airwalk was a fine example of sensitive development and creative ingenuity.<sup>81</sup> There was an immediate upsurge in confidence in the Huon as the venture exceeded its projected first-year tourism figures in only five months. Mike Wilson, Huon Valley businessman, tourism operator and local councillor, was buoyed by the effect, declaring:

Five years ago Geeveston was like a mangy dog which had been kicked and kicked and didn't want to get up. Even two years ago it was a place about to blow away. But now a bakery has opened, plus the town's first restaurant. There's pride in the place, a streetscape committee, and locals welcoming visitors. Geeveston these days is a bit like a football side - you can be down for years and years and then suddenly you get a win and taste success. That's what the airwalk has done for Geeveston and the rest of the Huon. And Southwood will do 10 times as much.<sup>82</sup>

New businesses started to appear in the region. These included Tassal's Atlantic salmon processing factory at Huonville, which created more than 150 jobs; Huon Valley Mushrooms at Glen Huon forty jobs; along with the Airwalk, with thirty jobs after completion of construction plus the expected spin-offs from the projected 100,000 visitors. There was a proposal for a new walk be established to South-East Cape, Australia's most southerly point, which could open up a two-day walk to Cockle Creek. That along with a planned wilderness lodge in the area was expected to create a further eighty jobs.<sup>83</sup> There was a feeling that the Huon (population just 13,500), and so long a day trip for visitors was poised to become a tourist destination in its own right.

At the same time another big project was waiting in the wings. Southwood, as mentioned by businessman Mike Wilson, was a massive new sawmill complex, planned as a joint venture between FT and construction company, John Holland Group. Southwood is situated in state forest some twenty kilometres behind Huonville and was established by FT in 2007 as an integrated log processing operation to take logs from regrowth and plantation forests. Plans included both a veneer company (to be operated by Malaysian-owned Ta Ann Tasmania) and a sawmilling operation.<sup>84</sup> Political machinations and manoeuvrings in negotiations around the new mill were prolonged, and again 'people's hopes were being raised and dashed, raised and dashed'.<sup>85</sup> Richard, former FT executive, explained:

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81 Madeleine Milford, 'AirWalk opening hit by vandals', *The Mercury*, 2 July 2001, p 3.

82 Mike Bingham, 'Another challenge overcome', *Sunday Tasmanian*, 16 December 2001, p 9.

83 Mike Bingham, 'No more the HIDDEN VALLEY', *The Mercury*, 9 September 2000, p 37.

84 Julian Amos, 'Southwood', 20 October 2012, p 1. Accessed 17 August 2017 at <http://julianamos.com.au/index.php/forestry-and-mining/121-southwood>.

85 Richard, former Forestry Tasmania executive, pers com.

People already knew we were doing the two things in parallel so there was no suggestion that the tourism thing (*sic*) was going to replace the timber jobs, the forestry jobs. It was that this [the airwalk] would be additional to a parallel investment [the sawmill] but [the sawmill] just took a whole lot longer.<sup>86</sup>

While people might have known about the new mill, it seems a key step was overlooked in the planning process, that is, consultation with the local community. Clearly, Richard, former FT executive, believed this process was properly managed: 'I went to copious public meetings and we had hundreds of people giving briefings'. However, local businessman Layton saw things differently:

There was lots of meetings. But what was the forward planning? What did they foresee that was going to happen in Geeveston? Because it's all right for them to say, well we're going to give you a hall up here or we'll make your hall into this and we're going to do that, but what was their planning for 15, 20 years' time when the industry was sort of null and void really? You come out thinking, I really don't know anymore. And when you're dealing with guys that just want to be told whether their job is going to be there or whether it's not, telling them about the fancy trip to Singapore to try to secure the timber or do whatever ... at the bottom line all they want to hear was—have I got a job?<sup>87</sup>

It goes without saying that communication in any community debate is an important tool to avoid conflict or to avoid misunderstanding escalating to conflict.<sup>88</sup> Arguably, while FT attempted to deploy participatory approach strategies, the reality was that these strategies were ineffective in the public consultation process. In light of the plethora of scholarship on effective communication strategies in such situations, it is unclear why the 'copious' meetings referred to by both Richard and Layton were so poorly received and poorly understood by the locals. Nevertheless, with the new mill there was a promise of a return to traditional values, once more based on extractive primary industries—if people could just hold on a little longer.<sup>89</sup> Despite having to wait a further six years, this was the security that many townsfolk craved, and for this group, there was no need or motivation to alter their cultures of nature or to undergo real and lasting personal change.

For other residents, changes in attitudes and behaviour started to appear. Grudgingly perhaps, they came to accept a new direction; with a guarded recognition that tourism could benefit their disadvantaged community, and with a qualified acquiescence that tourism and forestry industries might truly co-exist and thrive. As well as the continuation of traditional logging, businesswoman Sandra suggested that some of the former timber workers had managed to enhance their existing skills, by 'boat building, and wood

86 Ibid.

87 Layton, Geeveston resident, businessman, pers com.

88 Yang Edmond, 'Environmental Management: Communication and Conflict during Environmental Inspection: A Case Study of Uppsala Municipality (Sweden)', M Env Comm and Mgt thesis, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 2010, p iii.

89 The contentious Newwood Mill opened in 2007. It was purchased by Gunns Ltd in 2009 and subsequently closed for 18 months after that company ceased trading. Forestry Tasmania purchased the mill in 2012 and leased it to Neville Smith, which exercised an option to purchase in 2015. Ta Ann Tasmania continues to operate a rotary peel veneer mill at the site.

turning which is tourism'.<sup>90</sup> Yet there were limits to how much they would compromise. Yes, they could reconcile the need for environmental protection—provided it was in a limited area, and yes, they could accept the changes to their forest town—provided that timber would still be harvested in the Southern Forests. As retired professional Don rationalised: 'Things are not all that bad. 200 tonnes of wood goes past my door every day ... there are more trees out there now than when my family started cutting 'em down 150 years ago'.<sup>91</sup>

It has been suggested that resident perceptions of tourism are underpinned by a number of factors—their level of concern for the continued growth of their community; their emotional attachment to their community; the degree to which they are environmentally sensitive; and the extent to which they use the same resource base as tourists use.<sup>92</sup> These points are illustrated in Sandra's words:

If [our forest town culture] was lost I'd say there'd nearly be World War III. All the people that have lived through the decades, if they ever tried to take that timber town away, that would not be good. But we can live with tourism because it still all involves trees. It's what [tourists are] going to see. So whether they're taking them down to make wood or whether they're going to see them it's still timber and we're still a timber town.<sup>93</sup>

The Tahune Airwalk continues today as a successful tourism venture, despite considerable struggles over its seventeen-year history. In 2001, the Airwalk was the tenth most-visited tourism attraction in the state, with annual visitation of about 150,000 visitors. However, numbers dropped significantly over the next fifteen years, with FT 2016 figures showing that only about 74,000 people visited annually in recent times. In 2016 FT offered the Airwalk for sale, ostensibly in a bid to focus on its commercial activities. Resources Minister Guy Barnett said the move would help put FT on a pathway to financial sustainability. 'That means focusing FT on its core business of growing trees, managing land and selling wood,' he said.<sup>94</sup> Tourism Industry Council Tasmania chief executive Luke Martin saw things a little differently, but insisted the attraction had huge potential in the right hands. 'It boomed when it opened, had great growth and then plateaued', he said, adding:

If you give it certainty and out of the straitjacket of Forestry Tasmania, you can expect some innovation that will take it to a new level. It is by far and away a major drawcard to the deep south of the state ... it is critically important to the local economy.<sup>95</sup>

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90 Sandra, Geeveston resident, businesswoman, pers com.

91 Don, Geeveston resident, retired professional, pers com.

92 Dogan GURSOY, Christina Chi, and Pam Dyer, 'An examination of locals' attitudes', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol 36, 2009, p 723.

93 Sandra, Geeveston resident, businesswoman, pers com.

94 Matt Smith, 'Forestry Tasmania puts Tahune Airwalk up for sale', *The Mercury*, 14 September 2016, p 25.

95 Ibid.



The business sold in 2016 to an international consortium for an undisclosed sum. Back in 2001 Southwood Project Manager Dario Tomat predicted that Geeveston needed a diverse mix of businesses to remain viable. Tomat believed that Geeveston needed not only tourism but also world-scale, competitive forestry, farming and fishing, along with niche markets like crafts and organically grown produce to sustain the standards of living the community expected.<sup>96</sup> The critical importance of the Airwalk in this mix was never more evident than when FT closed the attraction and its access road for six weeks during the winter of 2015 for maintenance and to log a nearby eucalyptus forest coupe. The town struggled through the closure and was forced to prepare for even further change with FT's Forest and Heritage Centre due to close later that year.<sup>97</sup> Local business leader Andrew Burgess looked to food and wine operations to shore up the town's fortunes. Despite a recently-opened wine bar and restaurant, and an internationally renowned sushi outlet, and many accommodation venues, Burgess said locals had nowhere to eat at night and tourists were often left stuck for a restaurant meal: 'There's a real lack of it in town. As we're knocking off from the hardware store we can see the campervans, head out of the window looking for somewhere—everything's shut and away they go'.<sup>98</sup>

The conclusion in this paper is based on the notion that people in rural communities have diverse perceptions of land use, and that every community member will react to the growth of nature-based tourism according to their cultural value position. What exists in the Geeveston community today is greater than an uneasy truce. Timber still plays a key role in the hearts and minds of residents. Ultimately, a harmonious agreement has been achieved, with their local identity underpinned by new values and awareness. When considering tourism development in rural areas such as Geeveston, it is necessary to understand the cultures of nature of residents, that is, the likely ideological opposition to environmentalism brought about through decades and generations of being part of an extractive primary industry.

The taken-for-granted structures of daily life, followed by fundamental changes required to become part of a service economy, created enormous challenges for Geeveston and generated prolonged social conflict, community tensions, and animosity. Deeply inculcated and intransigent cultures of nature endured, but socio-economic and political pressures were extreme. Once benefits started to flow to the whole community, a partial and conditional transformation of cultural values occurred.

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96 Dario Tomat, Letters to the Editor, *The Mercury*, 1 January 2001, p 14.

97 David Beniuk, 'FT under fire over tourist attraction', *Sunday Tasmanian*, 6 September 2015, p 17.

98 David Beniuk, 'Timber town's foodie future deserves a top drop', *Sunday Tasmanian*, 6 September 2015, p 17.