

Wayfinding in the west

THE UNCONFORMITY

by Saskia Haalebos—March Artist in Residence with The Unconformity

Where to begin ...

Last August I was supposed to fly to Tassie. I was heading to Queenstown for an art residency with The Unconformity—an opportunity I still can't believe I wrangled. I mean, didn't they know I was just a ratbag from the outer suburbs of Canberra? Across 2020 and 2021, I'd had exhibitions postponed, hours cut from my job, and many 'unfortunately ...' emails in response to applications for artist support during COVID. Queenstown had been my glowing light, something uplifting to focus on while working from home and while writing letters to my ancient Nanna who I couldn't visit across town. Alas, the night before my flight, the ACT went into lockdown.

It really was one of those 'last straw' moments. I was gutted.

However! Flash forward seven months and I'm driving solo on the Lyell Highway exclaiming (and yes, out loud), 'Stop it Tassie, you're too beautiful!' It was a wild concept to think that after everything, I was amongst the soft sideways light in the middle of lutruwita. Tiny mind blown.

By the time I got to Queenstown I was nervous. What would I make here? What if I had no ideas? What if they found out I was a fraud? All of the ridiculous things brains tell their owners started to surface, but after an evening with kind humans, whippets, and glasses of bubbly, I knew it would be OK.

For the first week I said yes to just about everything: dinners, coffee club, walks, studio visits, a go on the Pianola at the Galley Museum—it really was a whirlwind of events for such an introverted hermit. Exhausting, but liberating.

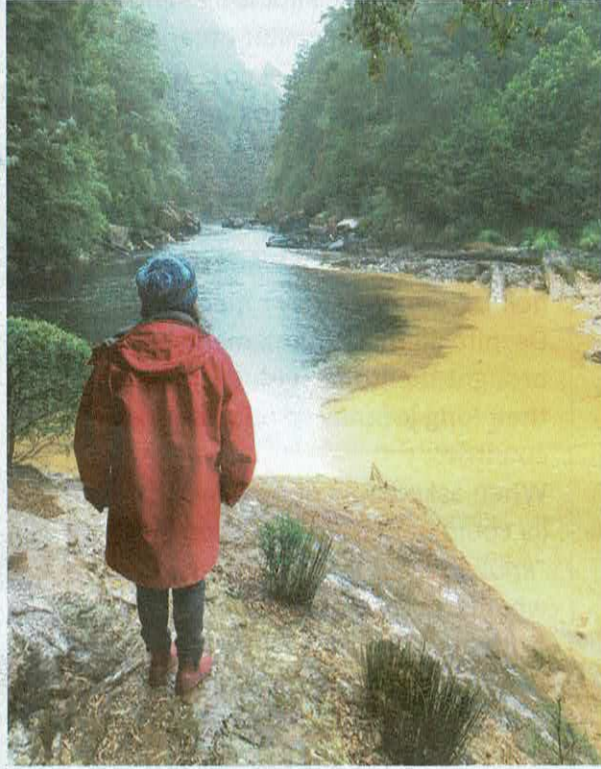
After another yes, on day eight

I stood at The Confluence and had an epiphany: I had come to Queenstown burnt out and resigned to quitting art. I hadn't had the energy, resolve or ideas to keep going. Or so I thought. I had been at a crossroads, and then, just like that, like this meeting of magnificent

rivers, I moved purposefully on. Over the next week in the spacious Unconformity Hall, I frantically scribbled poetry, projected work onto the wall, filmed improvised theatre, took wasps outside, and had a go at opera singing (apologies to the woman who lives next door). Interjected with all this I got tipsy at Q Bank, ate vegan Thai, and visited PressWEST. I looked out from Spion Kopf, walked a gravel oval, marvelled at Mt Owen, patted dogs, and made some very dear friends. Thank you Queenstown, you are my orange tape on trees—my wayfinders. You are a remarkable and generous bunch. I've returned home feeling rebuilt, motivated, and brimming with ideas.

And finally, to the petrol station staff, you're right, Lonely Planet is SO wrong. Queenstown is a place of beauty and wonder and resilience. I'll see what I can do ...

The Unconformity Artist in Residence Program is supported through Arts Tasmania by The Minister for the Arts.

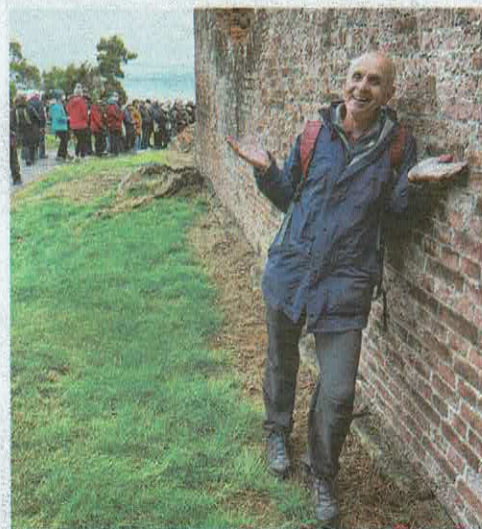


A taste for West Coast history

By Philippa Duncan



While it was his first visit to Sarah Island, it was a homecoming of sorts for Peter Dowling (pictured below). Mr Dowling played the convict Thomas Bodenham in the 2008 film *The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce* which tells the story of the cannibal who, one by one, ate the seven men who escaped



the penal colony with him 200 years ago.

"I was the second one eaten," Mr Dowling recalls. "I was the oldest and was slowing them down."

The Irish-Australian production was actually filmed in and around Derwent Bridge, but the conditions were just as tough. A river crossing took 12 takes. "The scene was to show I was lagging behind," Mr Dowling said. "I actually ended up with hypothermia. I could not stop shivering."

Mr Dowling now puts his acting skills to work at the Royal Hobart Hospital where he works as a clown doctor. He visited the West Coast this month on a Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA) excursion to mark the bicentenary of Sarah Island. The visit left Mr Dowling amazed at the endurance and grit of the eight convicts who escaped the isolated hellhole. "I kept slipping and sliding in the bush,"

he said. "The director actually said to me, 'you're overdoing the acting' and I said, 'no, I can't keep my feet!'" The THRA group of 20 spent four days mining the rich history of the West Coast and enjoyed rare access to the old Mount Lyell headquarters including the time capsule that is the technical library of the company's pivotal early general manager Robert Sticht (see photo at left). There were also stops at the old Royal Hotel at Linda and Penghana. Then it was onto the RoamWild mini

bus to see the relics of old gold mines and ancient Huon Pines near Newall Creek and a trip underground at an old Copper mine at Mount Jukes. The Lake Margaret Power Station and West Coast Heritage Centre and Mining Museum at Zeehan also impressed.

The excursion, expertly curated by retired geologist Malcolm Ward, was oversubscribed so a repeat is planned later this year to accommodate those who missed out. History buffs just can't get enough of the West.

Husqvarna

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8.00AM TO 5.00PM

WEST COAST MOWERS