

Care for places dear to our hearts

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EMBRACING PLACES: Tourists on the kunanyi summit look over Hobart, with inset of Dennes Point on Bruny Island.
Main picture: MATT THOMPSON

PEOPLE fall in love with places.

Politicians and planners who ignore these love affairs do so at their peril.

The attachments of people to Lake Pedder, Battery Point, the Franklin River, Ralphs Bay, the Tamar Valley, Freycinet National Park, kunanyi, and the forests of the Florentine and Tarkine make those in love very upset when developers want to make money by trashing their loved ones, even if environmental assessments reveal no "values" in the conventional sense.

Last year in Talking Point, I wrote of the place component of the Nine Nations project of the University of Tasmania ("Sacred ground and clothes pegs", *Mercury*, October 3, 2016) that I have been engaged in with Ted Lefroy and others. We wanted to find out whether people's attachments resembled the precolonial political geography of Tasmania, the nine Aboriginal national territories. We wanted to find out whether Tasmanians formed groups with distinct patterns of place attachment.

We call these common patterns "place spaces". We were also curious to find reasons for attachment and if these differed within and between place spaces and between Tasmanian born and immigrants.

Our results are exciting.

We have indeed nine place space nations, four of which are largely coincident with the territories of four of the Aboriginal nations, and only one of which does not have some degree of geographic integrity.

We have a nation in the North Midlands centred on The Gorge. We have a nation centred on Bruny Island. We have a nation that

Jamie Kirkpatrick tries to make sense of our romantic attachments to so many special places all over Tasmania

approximates the territories of the Big River people. We have a Wild West nation centred on Cradle Mountain.

Outside these, we have four nations centred on kunanyi, Battery Point, Hobart CBD and Freycinet/Bicheno. A final disparate group consists of leftovers, people attached to only one or two places.

Almost all those born in Tasmania referred to their childhood experiences.

"Dennes Point, Bruny Island. My grandfather bought a property there after WWII and built a shack which was completed in 1951, the year of my birth. I have been going there ever since and am now a part-owner of the property. It has all the memories of a happy childhood spent there playing beach cricket with my cousins and neighbours," one reflected.

Those who moved to Tasmania in later life or moved from Tasmania when very young then returned, were attached to places in which they lived, holidayed or recreated in Tasmania as adults, with a large proportion strongly attached to the beauty and spirituality of historical and natural landscapes.

"Takone and the Tarkine wilderness, North West Coast: proud of being able to explore the vast expanse of bush, enjoying the scenery. The

surroundings always ground me," one reported.

Another said: "Maria Island: the sense of history and connection to the convict era from the story of William Smith O'Brien, as an Irishman, is palpable, and the wildlife is awesome."

Another: "South West Tasmania: wilderness for the most part, with unparalleled resource for personal challenge and 'spiritual' rejuvenation. Particularly the thickly vegetated river valleys and the rugged higher peaks."

Many of those who lived in Tasmania in their childhood had developed attachment to landscapes beyond childhood experience, and many who had moved to Tasmania were not attached to places because of their natural or cultural heritage, but rather as their now familiar homes, often associated with positive life events.

One said: "Cygnet area, which I felt an immediate affinity for on visiting Tasmania, the shape of the hills and the green sweet smells of rotting apples in the winter."

Another said: "I met my fiancée at a conference in Hobart and he took me up the mountain ... the mountain to me represents love, an incredible life change."

There was no one genius loci for the more mentioned

places. For example, the strong sense of place attached to kunanyi (Mt Wellington) is highly diverse in its origins. People are attached to varying combinations of its beauty, familiarity, symbolism of home, nature, rewarding recreation, childhood associations, life associations, spirituality and nurturing presence. Some engage physically in its depths and heights for "amazing views and beautiful bushwalks". Others are content it is just there: "Each morning when I go outside to pick up the paper, I look up at the mountain and relish the view."

The mountain was significant "because I see it from my kitchen windows every day" and it is "iconic of Hobart and signifies that I'm home". Some referred to its suitability for "bushwalking, epic rock climbing, mountain biking, jogging and botanising".

"It also gives us bush land in our vistas that keep us close to nature, and our origins," one response.

"My family had a cottage at Ferntree when I was a kid and we spent most school holidays walking on the mountain," another said.

Another: "For most of my life I have looked at this sleeping beauty with awe and hope that we as humans supposedly protecting Mother

Nature will leave her alone."

One respondent said kunanyi was "wild, awe-inspiring, serene" and "where I want to end up", while another said it was the "backdrop to Hobart, always changing, different moods, like a mother".

Kunanyi featured strongly in several of the place space nations, as did the Freycinet/Bicheno area.

Kunanyi was central to the sense of place of a large proportion of those living in southern Tasmania.

The main lesson I have

learned from reading people's comments and exploring the data is that Tasmania is so wonderful in its communities of people, nature, beauty and built heritage that it is unlikely that any native, immigrant or visitor would not fall at least a little in love, very quickly.

Yet maintaining the object of our affections seems so difficult as we are assailed by prospective cable cars, plans for glass hotel towers with junk sails, the massive clearance of bush that will take place from a recent government decision and the

existing and prospective pollution of our coastal waters permitted by the Environmental Protection Authority.

We have something very special. Let us work to keep our places worthy of our love and that of future generations

Jamie Kirkpatrick is Distinguished Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania. His recent books of humour, *The Tasmanian Development Calendar* and *Conservation Worrier*, also address the above issues.

