

# The way it was

Tereetee Lore / Kaye McPherson

*Manuta Tunapee Puggaluggalia, Historical and Cultural Association for Lia Pootah Aboriginal Community,  
PO Box 1437, Lindisfarne 7015, Tasmania*

Unreviewed contribution

Keywords: Tasmania, remnant, landscape, Aboriginal, regeneration, regrowth, industry

**ABSTRACT:** When reconstructing areas of damaged landscape, analysis of remnant growth patterns is a priority. How accurate can this method be? Often an area has undergone a number of changes and uses. Each change or different use will see a variation in the revival of the seed store in the ground. Changes in soil climate due to land clearing and regrowth patterns, often gives a false or misleading history. In some areas this will suit regeneration of different species dynamics. In Tasmania replacement areas of forest to original vegetation are often very different to what was once there. One particular area close to Hobart, Grass Tree Hill, today dominated by gum and wattle, was once open woodland with an understory almost exclusively of grass trees. Every grass tree was harvested for the furniture varnish industry in the 1890s and early 1900s. The area at the southern base of Grass tree Hill, Risdon Cove, was a marsh with a series of lagoons. Recently landcare regeneration projects of the area have planted trees based on modern regrowth patterns not relevant to the past. By using primary historical records, reconstruction of the original forest and understory can be determined. Reconstructing the landscape of Grass Tree Hill and Risdon Cove over the last two hundred years is just a matter of careful research.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 *The area today*

Risdon Cove and Grass Tree Hill, two separate places today, were the same geographical place in the Aboriginal landscape of the past. Risdon Cove, on the eastern bank of the Derwent River at the foot of Mount Direction, Tasmania's first invasion point of British settlement in 1803, is today a shallow muddy tidal flat with a narrow water channel. Grass Tree Hill is now known only as a road crossing the Meehan Range to Richmond. Historically, Risdon Cove has become the place of Lieutenant Bowen's incompetence in choosing a settlement site, Tasmania's first Aboriginal massacre, and as a place abandoned in 1804.

Reconstructing any landscape becomes successively more difficult after a variety of modifications have occurred. Australia-wide the Aboriginal managed landscape has been progressively changed into farmland, then covered by towns, which in turn have become urban sprawl with remnant vegetation on the edges. Developing an understanding of these changes can be difficult, but the starting points are always the same.

Initial descriptions of landscape from surveyors or the land grantee and newspaper advertisements give an optimum starting point for all research. The most ignored resource is the oral history of an area. In many instances farming properties have been worked for generations by

the same family who can be a mine of information and include all types of landscape modification from clearing and draining to infilling those unwanted gullies.

The landscape around Risdon Cove and Grass Tree Hill has undergone considerable structural alteration over the last 200 years (associated with drainage and altered water flow), although there have been limitations insofar as urban sprawl. Changes through farming procedures, over firing, and the more recent landcare regeneration projects, have considerably altered, not just the landscape, but the biodiversity. The Risdon Cove of 1803 is totally degraded. Part of the long valley is now a satellite suburb, one hill is occupied by the state prison, another hill acts as a dam wall to a reservoir. The remaining hills have small acreage farms from 5 to 300 acres, bounded by Crown land and forest reserves, where past deforestation of the steep hills has seen the thick mulch and shallow topsoil washed away leaving steep slopes with exposed poor rocky soil.

Despite these changes the integrity of the original landscape of Risdon Cove/Grass Tree Hill is still discernable. Unfortunately, it is the remnant bush and grassland species abundant on the surrounding hills, representing only a partial biodiversity, that are now used as a baseline for local Landcare groups when replanting the valley floor and creek banks. These “native species” are always planted inappropriately in both location and in the straight lines of plantation style planting, when other practices are more appropriate.

## 2 RECONSTRUCTING GEOGRAPHY OF PLACE

### 2.1 *Risdon Cove and Grass Tree Hill*

Without an historical time line of what was growing in the past, planning revegetation planting of native bush in the present becomes a problem later. Sometimes inappropriate planting programs are the result of Landcare Groups using only remnant vegetation or material that has been selectively researched. Currently the rebuilding of the Risdon Prison at the junction of the modern Risdon Cove and Grass Tree Hill Road has resulted with a landscape architect plan for a treescape that never existed at the site in any time frame. Risdon Cove, again an Aboriginal controlled area, since 1999, has been regenerated along a European vision of place, relating to today’s geography by ignoring all the changes including the range of plant species that grew in the original Aboriginal landscape and modifications by farmers in the last 200 years.

Regeneration, without the inclusion of species’ range of the original landscape, becomes incomplete or superficial, especially when the person offering advice is relying on what canopy species are growing in the Risdon Cove/Grass Tree Hill area today. Over firing and fire reduction of ‘fuel’, once called understory species and natural mulch, has resulted in only canopy species surviving. Some species such as Wattle, Native Hop and Box, Bull and Sheoak are considered understory in many places based on their modern growth patterns. Pre-invasion these same species were part of the canopy. Very few if any of the native trees in the area are mature. Most would be around 60 years old, only a few over a 100 and none would have reached maturity and height pre invasion. There is no visual indication of the understory of the past, although photographs and paintings exist.

However, many modern records including landscape and/or so called heritage surveys fail in relation to linkages with geography and past plant diversity leading to the problem of inappropriate species used in landscape regeneration. Davenport (1989), Hudspeth et al. (1994) and Scrips (2001) have written reports for the local council that are used by the landcare groups describing limited urban sprawl. These reports have little information about the marsh drainage and altered water flow, which combined with the removal of the native fauna, has destroyed the original biodiversity. Despite the poor information changes the integrity of the original landscape of Risdon Cove/Grass Tree Hill is still discernable. It has been a tragedy for the landscape when in the name of regeneration of a native plants, enthusiastic removal of the introduced trees and plants, many over a hundred years old and by rights should have attained heritage status, are replaced with so called “trees native to the area”. These replantings are always inappropriate with species, location and in the straight line of plantation style planting.

### 3 PROBLEMS WITH DATA USED FOR RECONSTRUCTING THE LANDSCAPE

#### 3.1 *What to look for*

Reports without a geographical context for any historical landscape create a problem in misinformation for understanding what was growing in the past in relation to the planting for regeneration. The geographical surroundings tell what was growing where based on aspects of sunshine, shade, gully slope and floor, including soil depth and drainage patterns, much of which can be verified with archival photographs and paintings of scenery. The historical geography of the Risdon Cove/Grass Tree Hill area has not been included within the reports, nor has the recent historical uses of the area been used by Landcare Groups whose replantings are based solely on remnant vegetation on the surrounding hills. The rebuilding of the Risdon Prison at the junction of the modern Risdon Cove and Grass Tree Hill Road has resulted with a landscape architect plan for a treescape that never existed at the site in any time frame (pers. com Janine Coombs 2004). The Aboriginal Lands Council at Bowen's settlement site at Risdon Cove has regenerated blindly using the European vision of place, dismissing past Aboriginal cultural usage of original landscape, and ignoring those physical changes to the land impact on the growth patterns different species. It is unfortunate that revisionist plantings fail to take into account historic modifications to the vegetation of an area, and the original biodiversity maintained by Aboriginal need.

Changes in the fire regimes and water table have resulted in stunted trees and removal of understory and grasses. The end result is a treescape where an inappropriate mixture of trees are planted in neat strait lines, totally unrelated to the original distribution of species, and the present geography of the land. This travesty is occurring with and architect designed regeneration at the Risdon Prison site, and Land Care Group replanting along the modern drainage creek flowing through Risdon Vale. It is apparent from the trees and grasses planted that little to no attempt was made to determine what plant species was there originally, other than what is growing in past regeneration areas now. Some original grasses flourishing in the grassland remnants adjacent to the regeneration areas are Sedges, Rope Grass and Kangaroo Grass, while Tussock Grass the only grass chosen for planting is then crew cut into neatness.

#### 3.2 *Effective results require good data*

The current regeneration of the Risdon Cove/Grass Tree Hill area at the prison surrounds has been based on a report for the Department of Justice in 2001 and advice from Greening Australia. This report considers:

the historic heritage of the site of Risdon Prison and its environs ... related specifically to the study area between 1829 and 1891 (Scripts 2001).

The time frame of the study is quite strange, as this area had already been extensively modified between 1803 and 1828 and later between 1892 and 2001. However, none of these modifications are included in the report despite the inclusion in the bibliography of a book, containing information describing the changes in the area over 200 years (McPherson 2001). According to the report the prison site is at the junction of "Risdon Brook and Grass Tree Hill Rivulet" the modern junction between Risdon Cove and the fresh water stream that flowed into Risdon Cove in 1803. Neither Risdon Brook nor Grass Tree Hill Rivulet has any historical identity, as both water courses are the modern result of marsh drainage occurring before 1830 and modified drainage lines from around 1950. Between 1829-1891, the prison site was a productive farm including a grazing area of grassland and bush, today's northern road boundary was a stream and lagoon complete with marsh. Later, sometime after the turn of the twentieth century, Risdon Cove boasted two large farms with hop fields and kilns one of which extended onto the prison site.

Until 1950 the area where the Grass Tree Hill Road passes the prison project, a hamlet existed and from the late 1930s an army camp in a small valley north of the road.

### 3.3 *The first modification*

According to the sketch by Lieutenant Bowen and descriptions by Surveyor Meehan in 1803 (HRA 1803a), the hill slopes were open grassy woodland, with the ridges of the hill tops densely wooded above a productive marsh and string of lagoons along a narrow valley fed by a fresh water stream. In 1798 Bass and Flinders during their circumnavigation of Tasmania anchored at Risdon Cove. They recommended it for later settlement based on the potentially fertile farming land at the head of Risdon creek:

The creek runs winding between two steep hills, and ends in a chain of ponds that extends into a fertile valley of great beauty. For half a mile along the head of the creek, the valley is contracted and narrow, but the soil is extremely rich, and the fields are well covered with grass. Beyond it suddenly expands and becomes broad and flat at the bottom, hence arise long grassy slopes that by a gently but increasing ascent continue to mount the hills on each side until they are hidden from view by woods of large timber which overhangs their summits ... the soil along the bottom, and to some extent up the slopes, is a rich vegetable mould (Flinders 1801).

Flinders further described Risdon Cove bay as a place where a ship could lie in 6 to 3 fathoms of water with a muddy bottom. . Where the stream of fresh water flowing into Risdon Cove “runs out of an extensive valley, that in the disposition of the ground, exceeds in beauty every other” that was met with, and:

the navigators obtained water from the creek by rafting hogsheads into it at high tide, and although late rain had muddied the water it was otherwise very good (Flinders 1801).

Lieutenant Bowen found the area perfect for an agricultural settlement.

A white sandy beach on the south side of the cove was backed by a steep hill covered in sheoak trees. The banks of the Derwent beyond Risdon Cove are “like a noble man’s park, every part a beautiful green and with very little trouble every valley could be cleared within a month”, with many places ready immediately for ploughing (HRA 1803b). The area of Bowen’s Hobart settlement had extensive grasslands of deep rich river bottom soil, a freshwater creek and lightly timbered areas. We know from the *Historical Records of Australia* and surveyors’ journals that the tops of the high hills surrounding the settlement were densely forested and the more gentle hills were grassed open woodland.

Lieutenant Bowen arrived at Risdon Cove 12 September 1803, with a convict compliment including one blacksmith, two sawyers and one house carpenter and three women as grass cutters. Almost immediately after landing the journal of the *Lady Nelson* records that Bowen “set the sawyers to work” producing timber for buildings and fuel, building Tasmania’s first recorded sawpit (Anon, in HRA 1803/1812). At some time during the first months a stone jetty with steps was built and a stone walled road lead to the top of the hill where the ‘settlement’ was built. Within months of their arrival Bowen’s group of 49 people were housed in 30 huts of varying sizes. Also assorted farm buildings all made from timber, one big stone store for the Commissariat, stock yards for the 38 swine, seven sheep, eight goats, one cow and Lieutenant Bowen’s mare had been constructed. There was even a fenced vegetable garden and a blacksmith’s forge for repairs (Lennox 1983). The production of the charcoal needed the forge and is the most wasteful use of wood ever recorded. It takes five to six tons of softwood to burn tons of hardwood to produce just one ton of charcoal, and Bowen’s blacksmith would have had to burn his own charcoal. How much charcoal was necessary to sharpen ploughs, axes and saws is unknown, but it took 15 bags of charcoal to make something as small as an axe (pers. comm. Karl Stevenson 2003).

Trees were always the first to go. Each free person was given a grant of land and within weeks we know that Messers Mountgarrett, Birt and Clark had their land cleared, ploughed and sown with wheat and barley. However, while it took four men twenty days to fell five hundred trees (Thomas 2000), there is no evidence to say how many trees were chopped down but presumably

considerably more than 500. The amount of land cleared was considerable. Wood was the only source of fuel for cooking and heating. A conservative estimate is that 80 to 100 tons a month were chopped for this purpose. In 1826, 600 tons in winter and 300 tons in summer per month were the minimum requirement of fuel for approximately 400 people (*Hobart Town Gazette 1826*).

Grasses and understory destruction by sheep grazing are not recorded, but the ploughing of land for crops and the removal of native animals for food all aided and abetted the destruction of the Aboriginal landscape as it became modified into Britishness.

## 4 AFTER BOWEN

### 4.1 *Farming and modifications*

In 1812 Colonel Andrew Geils, acting Commandant until the arrival of Governor Davey in 1813, purchased the land known as Risdon from Thomas Birch, extending Bowen's sandstone house with a two story brick addition. Clay for bricks and pottery was taken from the Aboriginal ochre mines found on the property. In the Geils papers receipts for the extension built between April 1812 and December 1813 indicate that 95,000 bricks were fired on site in two kilns. The colonial kiln probably used by the brick maker, Winwood, was a side fed down draft kiln built on site. It used a minimum of one and a half tons of wood per 1,000 bricks (pers. comm. Philip Neilson 2004). Mortar to bind the bricks and sandstone blocks was produced by burning Aboriginal middens and turned the shells into lime. For Bowen's settlement midden lime would have been essential as a lime wash to paint the inside of the houses, a quicklime for burials, and to "sweeten" land before farming. To produce lime a pit was dug on the beach or areas adjacent to the midden, filled with wood which in turn was piled with shells and covered again with wood. It took in excess of 20 tons of wood to make 36 tons of lime (Brand 1990).

Considerable modification to the area begun in 1803 and has continued unabated since. In 1814 Geils let Risdon Cove farm to Thomas Kent, famous for his work within the Wattle Bark industry. At that time the area consisted of 76 acres under cultivation producing 3,000 bushels of wheat and a large garden which produced immense quantities of apples, peaches and grapes etc. In 1829 Risdon was bought by Thomas Gregson, Tasmania's second Premier. The house, described as a mansion, was used by the Gregson family as a summer residence. Visitors wrote that the house was in a beautiful situation, residing on a knoll commanding fine views of the Derwent River and Mt. Wellington, overlooking the creek, spread out like a lake surrounded by woods (McCormick 1884, p. 127.). From the 1840s to the 1930s, the Gellibrand family had a productive farm that included the site of the Risdon Prison (pers. comm. Mrs Sargent 2001). The same area was once farmed by Birt in 1803/4.

Hunting is a pastime little considered as causing alterations of landscape, but removal of native fauna and later replacing it with sheep and cattle can dramatically affect the vegetation. Within ten days of arriving in 1803 Bowen's men had to go further afield to kill the meat for the table (McPherson 2004). Gregson's Risdon Cove was a transported British way of life, with smaller areas either worked or leased to tenant farmers as they were in Britain. Risdon Cove became a place of country estates, with seasonal or weekend hunting parties that became a way of life for some of the Hobart Town gentry. The lifestyle of the Gregson family at Risdon developed colonial fame as a result of Mr Gregson's arrangements of hunts and "respect as a sporting gentleman of artistic temperament" (McCormick 1884, p.127). Developing an overall historical understanding for landscape usage becomes paramount when reconstructing the regeneration and biodiversity. Risdon Cove never was the limited physical area perceived today.

The ephemeral needs to be considered when considering modifications. Farming was and is incredibly destructive to the Aboriginal landscape. Changes due to ploughing are obvious, but running sheep and cattle destroys the vegetation patterns by destroying plants and stopping regeneration of species. Sheep and cattle eat all the grass and even the bark of the trees and often leave the roots of trees exposed, thus changing the soil moisture content. In many cases it is the introduction of plants, such as groves of trees to make the landscape like home, hawthorns as

windbreaks and improving pasture grass, which all impact on the growing patterns of the original vegetation by altering the surrounding climate and changing the water table.

## 5 THE WAY OF RELATING TO THE LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED.

### 5.1 *Cultural perceptions*

It is cultural perceptions for the geographical landscape that aid reconstruction and regeneration. To the colonial British mountain ranges, creeks, rivers and marshes formed barriers, and the broad expanses of grassland indicated open spaces. To the Tasmanian Aboriginal people only the grasslands divided the landscape. For the early colonist access to many places was only by water as the 'settlers' perceived dense vegetation and mountain ranges impassable. McPherson (2004) notes that between 1803 and 1850 the colonists crossed into grasslands to hunt via the Aboriginal road at the head of the Risdon Cove valley. The Europeans called these roads bridle paths or stock routes and, while very well known and continuously used in the early times, they were poorly recorded. Reverend Knopwood hunted at Risdon Cove later noting in one entry it was a two mile walk from the Risdon Cove settlement to hunt (Knopwood 1804). In 1805 one record states that 17,064 pounds of Kangaroo were brought to the Commissariat (HRA 1805). As the amount of meat needed for supplies grew hunters moved further afield from the settlement.

The Aboriginal coastal grasslands, which supported the hunting grounds, became the districts of the Coal River Valley and Pittwater, noted as the wheat belt of the colonies with fertile grazing lands. Today these areas are unassociated historically and geographically with Bowen's Risdon Cove, and are a road distance of 12 km on the northeastern side of the Meehan Range. However, the historical geography of Risdon Cove tells a different story as both districts lie two miles away, as the crow flies. McPherson (2004) notes that between 1803 and 1850 the early colonialists when hunting crossed into these grasslands via the Aboriginal road at the head of the Risdon Cove valley.

Aboriginal roads were not designed for constant use or heavy traffic of people and stock or carts, being designed only for seasonal foot passage. With constant use by the British the roads quickly became quagmires in the damp areas and in wet weather completely unusable. These roads were always unsuitable for colonial needs, often being too narrow for carts and carriages. This Aboriginal road was not convenient for the colonial administrators, Governor Arthur and his cronies, who were the land grantees who were developing the top of Grass Tree Hill to include a town called Sheldon (pers. comm. Alex Green).

By 1833 so many complaints had been made about the road between Risdon Cove and the Coal River Valley that the government agreed to build a more suitable road. Rather than upgrading the Aboriginal road, which was relatively flat, the government always in need of hard work for convicts, used chain gangs to build a 12 km road on the side of Grass Tree Hill significantly extending the original 2 mile (3.22 km) journey.

Road building not only modifies the landscape, but road usage impacts on the surrounding land. Most of the tree coverage of the surrounding hills was removed at this time. During the building of the Grass Tree Hill Road temporary timber buildings were erected. One building, 90 feet by 36 feet and surrounded by a fence 72 feet by 186 feet housed the prisoners. A timber barracks was also built to house the overseers and military guards. A skillion was attached so that prisoners could still break stones in inclement weather. Wooden steps in three tiers led up to a wooden chapel 48 feet by 78 feet (Calder 1839). A blacksmith was employed whose forge sharpened picks and axes, removing, attaching and altering leg irons. Later the blacksmith had his forge at Malcolms Hut just north of Grass Tree Hill, at the beginning of the Coal River Valley (McFie 1985).

## 6 WITNESSES OF LANDSCAPE CHANGE

### 6.1 *Oral histories*

Landscape change is always witnessed, though not always noticed or recorded. Residents witness the subtle modifications of farmer owners or long time residents in all areas. McPherson (2001) records the oral histories of people who remembered the area. The following people have brought to light many changes in the area (McPherson 2001). Today there is no trace beyond one Marocarpa Pine and memory of the hamlet that once existed at the junction of the roads to Risdon Cove and Grass Tree Hill that serviced the farms in the area. As far as is known it had no name, consisting only of a school run by Miss Rawley, Post Office, shop, and several small bridges that crossed the creek that fed into Risdon Cove. Jenny Schmidt tells that at the top of the hill behind the prison, where you came into Risdon Vale via Sugar Loaf Road, there used to be a sawmill that was always catching fire. Dawn Jones remembers a large farm with stables in the Risdon Cove valley, which became the suburb of Risdon Vale, was owned by a family called Beards, who had sheep grazing in paddocks and in the 1950s an apple orchard, where the Risdon Vale School now is.

Mrs Sargent (nee Doreen Downham) lived in Bowen's house from 1936 until 1960 when the property was compulsorily purchased by the government. The Sargent family had owned the property for several generations and remembered many changes. For Mrs Sargent, Risdon Cove had deep water and was a place she took her children boating and swimming in the 1940s. She saw two of the three causeways built across the mouth of the bay between 1890 and 1975 which irreversibly destroyed Risdon Cove, making it the muddy bay of today. The long valley had two hop farms with their own hop kilns, one worked by the Sargents and the other worked by the Shone family between 1909 and 1950. The road today crosses part of the original Risdon Creek over a sandstone bridge built in 1838. The land had already been drained and the direction of the stream recorded by Bowen in 1803 was a drainage ditch working as an overflow for the lagoons and marsh, which were still existing in the valley.

Other oral histories include Mrs Beryl Farrell who moved to the area in 1962. Risdon Vale had no trees and the yard of her house at Poplar Road, at the far end of the valley, was full of bracken fern and sandy soil. A creek ran straight through the area joining up with a second creek near the prison property on Grass Tree Hill Road (McPherson 2004). Mrs Beryl Smith, the Risdon Vale postmistress until the 1970s, remembers coming into the Risdon Vale area in a row boat as a child in the 1930s with her father when there were still lagoons and a marsh to hunt ducks in season and to fish. The author remembers one summer seeing Bowen's creek winding along the base of Grass Tree Hill on the side of a narrow valley where a meadow was ablaze with blue sun orchids in the shade of the hill. A bike track constructed in 1990 destroyed the area.

Kath Darby in the Women's Army Corps in World War 2 was stationed at the army base near where Risdon Brook is now and she often acted as a guard. There is no trace of the army base today. With just one account it is possible that the base was secret. Darrel Homeyard has discovered that almost all of the soil fill for the drained marshes and much of the low swampy areas and lagoons of Risdon Cove/Vale came from the Zinc works a company on the shore opposite to Risdon Cove. The material came by trucks on the Risdon Punt, which for almost 200 years connected the eastern and western shores of the Derwent River. The Bowen Bridge built in the 1980s made this service redundant.

A 1983 history of the area notes the use of hawthorn hedges for field boundaries and windbreaks at Bowen's site and on the adjacent hills in fence lines (Kays 1983). Several of these hedges were in existence until the late 1990s when the Tasmanian Aboriginal Palawa community removed every dual heritage tree from the area, including the hedges and 150 year old oaks and elms which formed an avenue to the stone bridge. Willows adorning the area for almost two centuries are now classified as weeds and are being removed.

A surprising discovery of research is how under utilised pictorial material is in data collecting. Cameras were a toy from the 1840s and the hobby of many gentlemen and thousands of photos of

every topic were snapped. Painting was always a pastime for both sexes and innumerable water and oil sketches abound of colonial landscape and colonial expansion. There are few photographs of Risdon Cove but several exist of Grass Tree Hill. Another little used source is the nomenclature for a place. As with Grass Tree Hill a name in common usage is often an anachronism. Today there is no evidence why Grass Tree Hill was given the name, nor Kangaroo or Cockatoo Valley or White Kangaroo River but in the past it was the commonness of the feature which led to a name being given.

## 7 TO RECONSTRUCT WHAT WAS

### 7.1 Conclusion

Before any attempt at reconstruction, one should look at the geography of the area and then ask the questions: what has been changed? and by how much? The basic landforms, hills and mountains will usually stay. If the hills have been quarried away there will be records, and/or quarry scars on the hills. Trees in many areas have either migrated from the hilltops down the slopes onto the flats or are the results of modern plantings. Large areas of drained marshes always have a drainage ditch remaining which may in the present be called a creek or a stream, or even a storm water channel. Risdon Brook Creek, Grass Tree Hill Rivulet, and Risdon Vale Creek are drainage creeks used as runoff for the water once forming the marshes and lagoons. Topographical maps also give clues with their location of names for geographical features offering clues to the past. School Hill is at the back of the unnamed school, Blacksmiths Hill probably describes where the charcoal was burnt, Birts Hill, Shones Corner, Gathering Bush Hill, Flagstaff Hill and Saggy Flats are self explanatory and assist in reconstruction of landscape.

Then look at the evidence from the historical record. Amateur and professional botanists leave records of various sorts. Local Historical Societies are the best sources of local information. There will be at least one member who knows everything about the vegetation or birds or wildflowers or who lived where, when, and in all likelihood be a member who is an oracle about the area with forgotten trivia. Learn what grows in what soils, which slope or gully favours what species. What was the traditional Aboriginal use for the area? Was it a hunting ground becoming the source of meat for the 'settlers'? Was the place a drover's stop, Aboriginal ceremonial place, a bird hunting or a kid's yabbie area in the past? Are there walking and/or bridle paths that lead into hidden places or offer short cuts to places? What are the oral histories? Look at the colonial introduced plants as many replace native species. Willows in many areas have replaced the Melaleucas, Tea Trees and Paper Barks on creek banks. Sometimes 'natives' from one area have been replaced with 'natives' from other places. At Risdon Vale/Cove there are now wattles from New South Wales, and inland Swamp Gums on the banks of the drainage creeks, clearly a revisionist regeneration. Kays (1983) notes that the south facing slopes of the past had thick tree cover reducing sunlight to the floor, with the dry stony ground on the west slopes having sparse tree cover and thick grasses with thick mats of dead leaves and twigs forming mulch as the list of trees were once canopy.

Then there are the grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) that gave Grass Tree Hill its name. Beyond limited references to their use in the varnish industry and several pictures from the mid nineteenth century it is as though they never existed. Today there are a few small grass trees surviving, but there is no indication in the landscape, or people alive who remember that they were ever as dense as in the surviving pictures show. No history of the area dealing with the vegetation has included the grass trees of Grass Tree Hill.

To regenerate the area with similar species becomes simple when all the data are collated. The geography has not really altered, it has only been modified. There are still very wet areas in the winter, which once would have been the boarders or the marshes. The drainage creeks still contain water that flows, the hills are still dry and stony. Then why are the landcare groups only recommending tussock grass to be grown on the banks and slopes when a combination of *Dianella tasmanica* (Blue Berry or Dot and the Kangaroo), *Diparrenna morea*, (White Flag Iris), *Blandfordia punicea* (Christmas Bells) *Lomandra longifolia* a sagg (sword Grass) would be better



than tussock as a grassy understory in areas intended to be a bush screen? There are no understory plants such as *Boronia*, Heath, Tee Tees, or *Melaleuca* included in any regeneration programs. Nor are there any *Xanthorrhoea*.

Landcare recommended plantings for low exposed areas and creek banks include species of the endangered *E. risdonii* which is endemic to the hills of Risdon Cove. Once only found on the dry exposed hill tops, it is planted on the flat, adjacent to the creeks combined with other gums once found in more sheltered spots. Peppermint gum once favoured for charcoal, and Stringy Barks, two other gums which crowned the hills, are planted next to creeks. Black Wattle grew on the dry slopes and Silver Wattle on the wet slopes and valley plains of the valley floor. Species growth patterns were controlled by slope and angle to the sun and the moisture of soil. Regeneration does not mean that the landscape must look as it originally did, this is impossible. The clock can never be turned back so why do government departments and landcare groups insist on bastardizing the landscape by removing heritage plants because they are 'not native to the area' or 'weeds' and replanting with inappropriate native species. After two hundred years the vegetation patterns have changed and introduced species have acclimatised and become a part of the modern landscape vegetation. By knowing what was once there and what was introduced in the past, modern regeneration should combine the best of both worlds to reflect who we are today, not a token landscape that can never be.



Figure 1. From Robin Barker Lindisfarne Historical Society.



Figure 2. Risdon Cove circa 1850. From Mrs Schmidt resident of Risdon Vale

Plants and trees are not the complete Aboriginal landscape which was a complex biodiversity that encompassed all the ecological niches from creeks to hill tops. Poor selection of species mocks stated goals. Regeneration planners should pay more than lip service and the European view of place that never existed. Regeneration needs more than assorted trees planted just because they are called 'native'.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All those who remembered so much about the area which no longer exists, the local historians who know so much that has been forgotten and Margaret Long whose assistance is so invaluable.

## REFERENCES

- Brand, I. 1990. *Sarah Island Penal Settlement 1822-1833 and 1846-1847*. Tasmania: Regal Publishing.
- Calder, E. 1839. Field notebook for July 1839. Consult author for further details.
- Davenport, W. 1989. *Spirit of Clarence: a Tasmanian Community*. New Norfolk: Derwent Printery.
- Flinders, M. 1801. *Observations on the Coasts of Van Diemen's Land on Bass's Strait and its Islands, and on Parts of the Coasts of New South Wales Intended to Accompany the Charts of the Late Discoveries of Those Countries*. London: John Nichols.
- Geils papers bundle 7. Archive Office of Tasmania.
- Historical Records of Australia 1803a. Lieutenant Bowen 1803. Letter to Governor King
- Historical Records of Australia. 1803b Series 3 Vol. 11805.: Enclosure No. 1.
- Historical Records of Australia 1803/1812. Journal kept in H. M. Brig *Lady Nelson*, Vol. 1.
- Hudspeth, A., Scripps, L. & McFie, P. 1994. *Clarence Historic Survey*, parts 1&2. A report produced for the National Estate, Tasmania.
- Hobart Town Gazette*, 2 December 1826.
- Kays, M. 1983. *Investigating the site of the Risdon Cove Settlement*, Trial material for teachers. Risdon Cove Historical Site: Tasmanian Curriculum.
- Knopwood, R. 1804. *Bobby Knopwood and his times: from the diaries of 1804-8, 1814-17. Edited with introduction and notes by Mabel Hookey*. Hobart, Tasmania: W.E. Fuller, 1929.
- Lennox, G. 1983. *The first Settlement in Tasmania*, Trial material for teachers. Risdon Cove Historic Site project.
- McCormick, R. 1884. *Voyages of discovery in the Arctic and Antarctic seas, and round the world : being personal narratives of attempts to reach the North and South poles : and of an open-boat expedition up the Wellington Channel in search of Sir John Franklin and Her Majesty's ships "Erebus" and "Terror," in Her Majesty's boat "Forlorn Hope," under the command of the author : to which are added an autobiography, appendix, portraits, maps, and numerous illustrations*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington.
- McFie, P. 2000. *Dobbers and Cobbers: informers and mateship among convicts, officials and settlers on Grass Tree Hill Road, Tasmania 1830-1850*, Booklet private publication. Originally published in Papers and Proceedings Tasmanian Historical Research Association Hobart 1985.
- McPherson, K. 2001. *From the Dreamtime to Now: Risdon Cove Centenary of Federation*, Hobart: Manuta Tunapee Puggaluggalia Publishers.
- McPherson, K. 2004. *Selected Industries and their Impact on the Aboriginal Landscape of Van Diemen's Land from Invasion to 1830*. MSc thesis School Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania.
- Thomas, B. 2000. Forests to Fields and Fencing the Field. *Papers and Proceedings Tasmanian Historical Research Association* 47(2): 75-76.
- Stevensons, K. 2004. Blacksmith historian. In McPherson, K. *Selected Industries and their Impacts on the Aboriginal Landscape of Van Diemen's Land from invasion to 1830*, MSc thesis, School Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania.
- Scripps, L. 2001. *Risdon Prison Redevelopment Historic Cultural Heritage Survey*, a report for the Depart of Justice, Tasmania.