



Map of Tasmania

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Tasmania
ARTS TASMANIA



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A Writer's Tasmania
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A Writer's Tasmania

Volume 1

Edited by
Carol Patterson & Edith Speers
from an original concept
by Carol Patterson



Table of Contents

All opinions expressed in this book of essays are the particular and individual viewpoints of the authors. Tasmania has many remarkable natural resources and one of the greatest and least appreciated is its wealth of literary talent. Something there is about island life and island society that encourages a healthy scepticism for all 'received wisdom' and a creative flowering of unique perspectives and provocative perceptions.

A Map of Tasmania.....	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Foreword by Amanda Lohrey.....	<i>i - iii</i>
Growing Up in Hobart	
<i>Vivian Smith remembers Hobart as it was.....</i>	<i>1</i>
Childhood in Paradise	
<i>Alison Alexander tells stories from the Midlands.....</i>	<i>15</i>
This Pretty Prison	
<i>Robyn Friend ponders on tea and lava in Launceston.....</i>	<i>33</i>
Yesterday - Today - Tomorrow	
<i>Barney Roberts and his life-long home in the North West.....</i>	<i>45</i>
Walking the Track - Walking the Narrative	
<i>Carol Patterson walks the Overland Track in another character's boots.....</i>	<i>61</i>
Tapestry of Heroes	
<i>Richard Davey finds myths and heroes on the West Coast.....</i>	<i>71</i>
A Kind of Magic	
<i>Geoff Dean views the Huon, Bruny and Channel.....</i>	<i>81</i>
How Real Is It?	
<i>David Owen moves to Hobart from points north.....</i>	<i>93</i>
Great Scenery: Pity about the Fishing	
<i>David Young explores the Western Lakes, rod in hand.....</i>	<i>103</i>

Old Jack's Last Anchorage <i>Bob Brown, his dad and a farm on the Great Western Tiers.....</i>	117
Of Progress and Prudence <i>Tim Thorne looks at the history & pseudo-history of Launceston.....</i>	123
The Language Map <i>Elizabeth Dean returns to the North East.....</i>	133
Infinity in the Palm of Your Hand <i>Margaret Scott finds change and renewal on the Tasman Peninsula.....</i>	147
The Lucky City <i>Tony Rayner discovers that life can be good on the periphery.....</i>	155
Biographical notes on the Authors.....	175
Index of Place Names.....	183

FOREWORD

Amanda Lohrey

When the English novelist Anthony Trollope visited Tasmania in 1870 he was immediately seduced by its charms. 'If I were to ask any place for the English Government,' he wrote, 'it would be that of Governor of Tasmania. The climate is perfect, the scenery magnificent.' It was acknowledged, he noted, even by her rival colonies, 'that of all the colonies Tasmania is the prettiest.'

Since that time generations of visitors have come to perceive the island as a place of unique peace and beauty. The Greens leader, Dr Bob Brown, has described its wilderness as one of the great cathedrals of Nature, and when the Chinese Buddhist leader Master Wang was asked why he chose Tasmania as the site of his Australian centre and international university he replied, simply, 'Because Tasmania is a pearl.'

Writer's Tasmania brings together the personal perspectives of some of the island's leading poets, novelists, short story writers and historians, all of whom focus on a town or region they have lived in and come to love. Historian Tony Rayner and poet Vivian Smith write about Hobart. Carol Patterson walks the Overland Track while Elizabeth Dean explores the mysteries of the East Coast. Tim Thorne and Robyn Friend offer sharply contrasting meditations on the northern city of Launceston, while Alison Alexander recalls her childhood spent in one of Tasmania's most historic towns, Oatlands. Margaret Scott (the Tasman Peninsula) and David Owen (Hobart) write from the point of view of immigrants; Barney Roberts pays homage to the pioneering life of settlers

and battlers on the land in the North West and Geoff Dean recreates the magic of the Huon, Bruny and Channel. For that special breed of obsessive, the fisherman, David Young travels to the Western Lakes while Tasmania's Green senator, Bob Brown, relates a salutary tale about his haven on the Great Western Tiers. Finally, actor and playwright Richard Davey explains how, some years ago, he travelled to the West Coast to perform for a few weeks and why he is still living there in the mesmerising little town of Strahan.

It is Strahan, recently voted by a leading US travel magazine as the most interesting small town in the world, that represents one of the ironies of modern Tasmanian history, for this was command headquarters for the extraordinary Franklin River blockade that took place in the early nineteen-eighties. Intrepid souls from all over Australia came to oppose the building of a dam and protect one of the last wild rivers on earth. They did so because of their commitment to environmental values and yet, ironically, what they preserved has since made a major contribution to the economy of the state in terms of tourist dollars. Increasing national and international recognition of the uniqueness of Tasmania's landscape is emerging as potentially of greater economic value than all the old ideas of 'development' and 'progress'. Some of the most die-hard developers have come to recognise that Tasmanian soils and micro climates can produce clean, green produce of the highest quality, much sought after in the niche markets of the US, Europe and Asia. To quote Trollope again: 'every day (fruit) such as I had never eaten before, and as,—I feel sure,—I shall never eat again.' He had come to Tasmania, he wrote, believing that age had permanently jaded his palate, only to find that Tasmanian food had the power instantly to revive it.

Despite a dark beginning as an imperial gaol, Tasmania's natural isolation in the form of Bass Strait has served to preserve it from the worst depredations of the modern. And as Tony Rayner so illuminatingly sets out in 'The Lucky City', this is not something that the locals can always take credit for. Tasmanians have been no more or less virtuous or farsighted than people in other states. Often it has been

simply the case that great plans for despoliation and a fast buck have been thwarted by the languors of a provincial economy and an intractable surround of wild sea. Thanks to these, the island's air and water are still among the purest in the world. If Trollope were to return today, he would not be disappointed.

It is the writer's power, and privilege, to be able to express in words the love of place that most men and women feel with a passion second only to their love of family. It is the writer's gift to capture the spirit of landscape fused with memory, and the nurture of self and community that a deep respect for landscape and 'home' engenders. Over the years many artists of all kinds have made Tasmania their home, and continue to pay tribute to its beauty in their work. This is the first time, however, that a selection of its writers have come together between covers to celebrate the spirit of place.