



# Wildness

Morning light on Little Horn, Cradle Mountain. (Photo Peter Dombrovskis) © Liz Dombrovskis



## INTRODUCING WILDNESS

*What would the odds be of two men from Baltic states, each of them finishing up in Tasmania, being top wilderness photographers, each dying out there, each devoted one to the other?*

Max Angus, artist



## SYNOPSIS

Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis were two of Australia's greatest wilderness photographers. Their work became synonymous with campaigns to protect Tasmania's natural heritage.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, Olegas and then Peter used photography to galvanise public opinion as the Hydro Electric Commission cut swathes through the wilderness in the name

of progress. Olegas is renowned for his slide presentations which, over 20 years, brought ever-increasing attention to the island's unique landscape. In particular, he captured on film the pink quartz beach and tea-coloured water of Lake Pedder before it was drowned by a fiercely protested hydro-electric scheme.

Ten years later, Peter's magnificent photographs of the Franklin River were used to spearhead the successful national

campaign to save it from a similar fate. His photograph of the Franklin's Rock Island Bend became a national icon, establishing him as one of the country's most influential photographers.

Olegas and Peter shared many things, including a bond that was more like that of father and son. Both migrated to Tasmania from Baltic Europe. And both died alone doing what they loved - photographing the wild. They left behind a legacy of extraordinary images



- contributing not only to their art but to an emerging environmental consciousness in Australia.

Their philosophy was simple and remarkably effective - if people could see the beauty of Australia's wild places then they might be moved to protect them. They might also be encouraged to understand the true value of the world around them.

*Wildness* brings over 300 Truchanas and Dombrovskis photographs together with archival film and stunning contemporary footage, in an epic story of two men whose passion for nature became a crusade to save an environment under threat.

### **CURRICULUM LINKS**

*Wildness* is a useful teaching resource in a range of curriculum areas including: Studies of Society and Environment, Environmental Science, Outdoor Education, Australian History, The Arts, Media, English, Legal Studies, Politics.

The film can be used as a stimulus for a particular area of study, as a stand alone text, or as one of a range of texts for the study of themes and issues raised within it. The activities below provide options for these approaches.

### **BEFORE WATCHING**

#### **WILDERNESS**

*It is a wild land and I think that there is a certain wildness, a certain wild element in man's nature that is essential to the*

*humanness of man. If man becomes contained, too docile, programmed, then he becomes less human. And this wildness in the wilderness allows the wildness in man an expression.*

Peter Dombrovskis

Discuss the concept of wilderness. What does the term mean? What use is wilderness? What are students' experiences of wilderness?

The Wilderness Society says of wilderness:

*Wilderness is a remote area essentially unaffected and unaltered by modern industrial civilisation and colonial society.*

*Wilderness is the result of millions of years of evolution, and is large enough to maintain for the long-term, biological diversity and ecosystem processes.*



Left: Portrait of Olegas Truchanas (Photo Norman Laird). Right: Cushion plants, Mount Anne, southwest Tasmania (Photo Peter Dombrovskis) © Liz Dombrovskis

*Wilderness can be tropical jungle, forested mountains, alpine plains, open grasslands, arid woodlands, sand or gibber deserts or coral reefs.*

*Australian wilderness is also a cultural landscape that has been actively managed by Aboriginal people for tens of thousands of years. Wilderness is Aboriginal land.<sup>1</sup>*

#### OLEGAS TRUCHANAS – SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Olegas Truchanas was born in Lithuania in 1923. He fought with the underground resistance during World War Two, before arriving in Tasmania as a refugee in 1945. He had experienced the harshness and privations of war-torn Europe and in the wilderness of Tasmania found an opportunity to experience, record, and be renewed by places little known by white Australians. Truchanas conducted slide shows of his photographs and became involved in the conservation movement. His most famous achievement is his photographic record of Lake Pedder shortly before its flooding. Olegas Truchanas drowned while canoeing on the Gordon River on 6 January 1972. Peter Dombrovskis found Truchanas' body.

#### PETER DOMBROVSKIS – SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Peter Dombrovskis was born in 1945 in a refugee camp in Germany to Latvian parents. He emigrated to Tasmania in 1950 with his mother Adele. Both keenly explored the Tasmanian bush.

Through Adele, Peter met Olegas Truchanas, who took him on canoeing expeditions and encouraged his photographic endeavours. In time, Dombrovskis' photography came to be understood by the Australian public as a true representation of the Tasmanian wilderness. Dombrovskis was a keen conservationist; his work became iconic in the fight to save the Franklin River. Dombrovskis died of a heart attack on 28 March 1996, whilst photographing the Western Arthur Range in Tasmania's remote southwest.

#### INTRODUCING THE WORK OF OLEGAS TRUCHANAS AND PETER DOMBROVSKIS

While students may be familiar with wilderness photography, they are unlikely to have given it much thought. For students, such photography will often be understood as the fading posters on waiting room walls, or as postcards from friends and family. A few may have framed prints or coffee table books at home. Indeed, many students would be unaware that they may in fact know the work of Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis through some of their iconic images.

One introductory activity would be to provide examples of the work of both photographers for students to examine. It is quite difficult to find examples of Truchanas' photography; Dombrovskis' work is more readily available. Some examples may be found in the following:



Max Angus, *The World of Olegas Truchanas*, 1975, Olegas Truchanas Publication Committee, Hobart.

Peter Dombrovskis, *On the Mountain*, 1996, West Wind Press.

Peter Dombrovskis and Bob Brown, *Wild Rivers*, 1983, Peter Dombrovskis Pty Ltd.

Peter Dombrovskis website - [www.view.com.au/dombrovskis](http://www.view.com.au/dombrovskis)

#### LOOKING AT WILDERNESS PHOTOGRAPHY

Students may begin by looking for images of nature in their family photographs; they can then be asked to consider the



reason these images were taken. What was the photographer trying to capture? Beauty? Memory? Emotion? A sense of time or place? Art? Other motivations? Are these images of wilderness or of nature and what, if anything, is the difference between the two?

In order to develop an understanding of the wide-ranging use of wilderness photography, students could look for examples in their local environment. What is represented in these images? How is it represented? To what uses are such images put? Art? Advertising? Magazine and newspaper illustration? Other uses?

Above: Portrait of Melva Truchanas and Liz Dombrovskis. (Photo Matthew Newton) © NFSA. Left: Portrait of Peter Dombrovskis. (Photo Peter Jackson) © Peter Jackson





## HYDRO-ELECTRICITY

Tasmania has a large number of hydro-electric power plants. Where are these plants? Why does Tasmania have so many? How does a hydro-electric power plant generate electricity? What are alternate methods of generating electricity?

Hydro Tasmania - [www.hydro.com.au](http://www.hydro.com.au)  
Department of Infrastructure, Energy & Resources - <http://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/>

## AFTER WATCHING

### THEMES AND ISSUES

List the themes the documentary addresses. What view, if any, does *Wildness* present about each of these themes?

### MULTIPLE STORYLINES

*Wildness* is structured around several separate but interconnected storylines. List each of these and draw a concept map that illustrates how they connect. Each storyline has something to say about the others. How does this work?

### CONSTRUCTING A POINT OF VIEW

How can we read a film-maker's point of view? Consider the contribution of the following to the construction of *Wildness*:

- **Visual aspects**, including camera techniques—such as camera angles and movement—visual composition, colour, the use of both moving images and stills, and editing.
- **Sound**, including narration, voice over, interviews, editing of historical material, music and sound effects.
- **Story elements**, including the establishment of characters and locations, recreation of events, the interconnection of the multiple storylines in the documentary.

One feature of *Wildness* is the way still and moving images dissolve into each other. Over 300 original Truchanas and Dombrovskis images are used in the documentary. Why are the images



constructed in this way? What purpose does such a technique serve for audiences who are familiar with the original photographic representations, and for those for whom the subject matter is new? How might this technique influence the viewer?

### REPRESENTATIONS OF TASMANIAN WILDERNESS IN ART

Few of us have been to the Tasmanian wilderness, yet through the work of artists, photographers and film-makers we may feel that we know it. The representations created by visual artists have changed over the years as Australians have developed their understanding of the bush. By examining and comparing representations across time we can learn a great deal about our changing relationship with the environment.

For online collections of art and photography, visit: The State Library of Tasmania - [www.statelibrary.tas.gov.au](http://www.statelibrary.tas.gov.au)

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery - [www.tmag.tas.gov.au/index.html](http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/index.html)

- Indigenous representations

Indigenous Tasmanians were not nomadic; rather, they lived in small villages. Their art was an expression of their lives, culture and history. Find examples of the different art forms created by Indigenous Tasmanians. Compare these to the art created during later stages of Tasmanian history.

- Colonial representations

Many early artists painted the Tasmanian bush, Indigenous Tasmanians, and early settlements. These artists

had trained in England and Europe and tried, with varying degrees of success, to use techniques and colours appropriate to their upbringing. One of the most famous is John Glover. Find representations of the bush in colonial art and compare these to the work of Indigenous and modern artists. What do these paintings and drawings say about the way early white Australians thought about the bush?

### PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF TASMANIAN WILDERNESS

Photographers began capturing Tasmania as early as the mid 19th century. Images from that time include the increasingly popular stereo photographs, which were designed to be viewed in a stereoscopic viewer that simulated a three dimensional view. Copies of these may be found in the State Library of Tasmania's online Images collection from <http://images.statelibrary.tas.gov.au>. To view the 3D effect, hold a piece of stiff card in the middle of the two images against the computer screen, look at the left image with the left eye and the right image with the right eye whilst simultaneously allowing your focus to merge the images. What do you think of the effect? Why do you think such images were popular?

### OLEGAS TRUCHANAS AND PETER DOMBROVSKIS—OLD AND NEW WORLD UNDERSTANDINGS

*One of the most significant differences between the work of Olegas and Peter is that in Peter's work, people just aren't there and that does result in a radically different view of nature.*

Tim Bonyhady, art historian and writer

One of the stories of *Wildness* is that of two photographers born in the 'old world'; a world where it seemed that everything had been discovered and recorded. Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis came to Tasmania, much of which was pristine and had yet to be photographically explored, and opened up an appreciation of the wild through their images. Each brought their own experiences and understanding to their photography.

Truchanas was tantalized by the idea that he could possibly be the first person to explore and photograph sections of the Tasmanian wilderness. In Europe it was all but impossible to photograph an unencumbered skyline. Truchanas influenced Dombrovskis who, as a child arriving in Tasmania, had less of a sense of being the first to capture its beauty. However, he in turn developed his own motivations and emotional response to the land, which he expressed through his particular style of wilderness photography.

What does the documentary reveal about the influence of Truchanas on Dombrovskis?

Examine the reproductions of the work of both photographers. You may need to pause the video to do so. Note any influences you can determine. What do the experts interviewed in the documentary say about this?

Have another look at early paintings and photographs of the Tasmanian wilderness. In what ways do these representations differ from the wilderness depicted by Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis?

Research contemporary Australian wilderness photographers. What influences do you see in their work? How has wilderness photography developed in recent years?

Historic photographs of Tasmanian wilderness - Classic Image Photographs - <http://greataustraliansecret.com/what-to-do-in-tasmania/history-trail/#map>

Geoff Murray, contemporary wilderness photographer - [www.geoffmurray.com](http://www.geoffmurray.com)

Wilderness photography by Martin Hawes - <http://www.martinhawes.info/photography/>

## PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUE AND TECHNOLOGY

- Equipment

Each photographer used different equipment. Truchanas chose to work with a 35 mm camera. Why?

Dombrovskis chose to work in the 4 x 5 format. Why?

How does each format work? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

- Technology

When Olegas Truchanas began to photograph Tasmania he conducted slide shows of his work. This was a common form of entertainment in those pre-television days. What does the reconstruction of the slide show reveal about the importance of this form of entertainment as an educational tool? What roles do television documentaries serve today? What are the advantages and disadvantages for audiences of each form of technology? What might the digital technologies of the future bring to this subject?

Today, although there are very few public slide shows, professional photographers still often choose to work with slide film. Why?

- Composition

Wilderness photography has been described as 'noble composition' and also as 'introspection'. What do these terms mean? Find examples of each in the work of Truchanas and Dombrovskis.

Look at the compositional features of the work of both photographers. How do they use features such as line, pattern, texture, repetition, balance, light, motion, selective focus, colour, tone, contrast, space, scale and the rule of thirds?

Examine 'Rock Island Bend'. Compare this photograph with video footage of the location. What is the effect of a slow shutter speed on the work of Peter Dombrovskis? Why do you think he chose this effect? Can you imagine what the work would look like with a fast shutter speed?

What are the similarities and differences in the work of the two photographers? Why did Truchanas choose to include people in some of his images yet Dombrovskis did not? How has Truchanas

influenced Dombrovskis in the construction of his images? Research other influences on Dombrovskis' work.

- A practical activity

Photographers teach us to 'see' the world differently. In what way does the work of Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis inspire you? Choose a location in your local area, perhaps a piece of bush, a park or even a corner of your school. Design a series of photographs that convey this location in the style of wilderness photographers—think 'noble composition' and/or 'introspection'. Use the compositional elements discussed above to guide you. Sketch your proposed images and then use these sketches to help you take the photographs. Share your images with your classmates. Discuss what works and what doesn't. Do any of your images capture the style of Truchanas or Dombrovskis? What have you learnt from this exercise?

## CAREERS IN PHOTOGRAPHY

An excellent starting point for finding out about careers in photography (and in general) is My Future – Australia's Career Information Service at [www.myfuture.edu.au](http://www.myfuture.edu.au). (From The Facts, follow the link to Occupations under the Work & Employment section.)

Students can read about duties and tasks, areas of specialisation, skills needed, work conditions, the labour market, earnings and training options. Further links are also provided.

## ART AND POLITICS

*Peter's photography initially made the Franklin recognisable. Then it made it familiar and then with Rock Island Bend, he created an icon of that place.*

Tim Bonyhady

## LAKE PEDDER

Although the battle to save Lake Pedder was lost, in many ways this was the beginning of an organized environmental movement in Australia. It was also when the world's first Green party was born. Watch the Film Australia documentary





*Lake Pedder* (1997), and/or conduct other research. Why was Lake Pedder so special? How is the 'lake' depicted by the Hydro Electric Commission (HEC) and the environmental movement today?

#### THE FRANKLIN RIVER CAMPAIGN

The decision to dam the Franklin River was the impetus for a long and well-organized campaign of opposition. The Franklin River had been nominated for World Heritage status by the Federal Government in 1981, but this did not stop the HEC and the Tasmanian Government from pursuing its plans. The conservation movement had learned a great deal from the unsuccessful battle for Lake Pedder. The campaign was inextricably linked to the 1983 Federal election campaign and became an important constitutional test of a state's rights against Federal government intervention. The case went to the High Court in 1983.

Research this campaign, which saw tens of thousands of protestors and over 1200 arrests. How does *Wildness* depict the campaign?

In what light do you think the documentary portrays the government of Tasmania and the Hydro Electric Commission? How does the documentary achieve this? Do you think the government and HEC views of the situation would have been different?

What are the long-term influences of the fight for Tasmania's wilderness? You might consider its impact on the following:

- politics
- tourism
- the environmental movement
- energy sources
- how the world sees Australia

Between the fight for Lake Pedder and that for the Franklin River something

changed in the way ordinary Australians viewed the bush. What does *Wildness* have to say about this?

#### APPROPRIATION AND ICONOGRAPHY

*If we can accept the view that man and nature are inseparable parts of the unified whole then Tasmania can be a shining beacon in a dull, uniform and largely artificial world.*

Olegas Truchanas

*I'm not an activist by any consideration, but I do think it is terribly important that people do have visual material of these places, that they do have some inkling of what they are like. If people don't know, it's very much harder for them to feel for these places.*

Peter Dombrovskis,  
speaking of the Franklin River

Paintings and photographs have long been used in the pursuit of political goals.



Dwarfed *Melaleuca squamea* on Lake Pedder beach, Tasmania (Photo Olegas Truchanas). © Melva Truchanas.

This is sometimes referred to as appropriation, sometimes as propaganda.

*Wildness* forcefully sets out the role both Truchanas and Dombrovskis played in the fight for Tasmania's wilderness. What did they contribute to the campaigns for Lake Pedder and the Franklin River? Can you estimate the importance of their imagery?

How did the environmental movement use the works of Truchanas and Dombrovskis? Who 'owns' these images? What are the rights of the photographer?

It has been said that 'Rock Island Bend' became an icon that stood for the importance of wilderness. What does this mean? Can you think of other images of wilderness that have an iconic status?

### THE CALL OF THE WILD

*I go out there to get in touch with the land, to get in touch with myself. When you get out there, you don't get away from it all. You get back to it all. You come home to what's important; you*

*come home to yourself.*

Peter Dombrovskis

In what ways do you think *Wildness* encourages Australians to explore the bush as a way of finding themselves?

For both photographers, trips to the wilderness served a range of physical, emotional and economic purposes. What does the documentary have to say about each of these purposes? Discuss the importance wilderness plays in your life and in the lives of your family and friends.

Find out about opportunities for bushwalking and other outdoor recreation in your area. What activities can be done? Research guidelines for their safe enjoyment.

### A STORY OF HUMAN TRAGEDY

For some, the most important storyline in *Wildness* will be the human one; that of two men who both experience an early life of privation, who meet in a tiny corner of the world to share a grand passion. They excel at their art

and play a part in changing the mindset of an entire generation. They finally die in the wilderness that has supported and sustained them. Is this a story of heroic proportions? Was it, ultimately, all worth it?

### CLASS DISCUSSION, RESEARCH AND ESSAY TOPICS

*Wildness* demonstrates the power of images to change the direction of government policy. This was successful in the case of the Franklin River but not so in the earlier campaign for Lake Pedder. Suggest reasons why the earlier campaign failed.

It took the work of two 'new Australians' to make 'old Australians' see the possibilities of their world in a new way. Discuss.

Truchanas and Dombrovskis found themselves in the right place at the right time. Discuss.

In the case of the movement against the damming of the Franklin it is not possible to separate art from politics. What do you think?



Crew at work on Mt Wellington, Tasmania: LR Sue McGrath (Producer's attachment), Michael McMahon (Producer), Robert Humphreys (DOP - shoot 1), Martin Thiele (Production Manager, Melbourne), Chris Gallagher (Production Manager, Hobart), Liz Dombrovskis, Melva Truchanas, Scott Millwood (Director) (Photo by Matthew Newton). © NFSA.

Wilderness photography does not set out to show us what is, but educates us as to what might be. Discuss.

The difference between a snapshot and a work of art lies in the intent of the photographer. Do you agree with this statement? Why/why not?

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

The Wilderness Society - [www.wilderness.org.au/local/tasmania](http://www.wilderness.org.au/local/tasmania)

Australian Conservation Foundation - [www.acfonline.org.au](http://www.acfonline.org.au)

National Parks Association of NSW - [www.npansw.org.au](http://www.npansw.org.au)

Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water & Environment - [www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au)

Tasmania Parks & Wildlife - [www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/ThemeNodes/SSKA-4X33SG](http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/ThemeNodes/SSKA-4X33SG)

Australian Alps National Parks - <https://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/australia-alps>

Environment Australia - <https://www.environment.gov.au/topics/national-parks/parks-australia>

Wild Rivers National Park - <http://www.discovertasmania.com.au/about/national-parks-and-wilderness/franklin-gordon-rivers-national-park>

Hydro Tasmania (formerly Hydro Electric Commission) - [www.hydro.com.au](http://www.hydro.com.au)

#### WILDERNESS

A Film Australia National Interest Program in association with Big and Little Films. Developed with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission. Produced with the assistance of Film Victoria, Screen Tasmania and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

**Writer/Director:** Scott Millwood  
**Producer:** Michael McMahon **Executive Producers:** Franco di Chiera, Penny Robins  
**Year:** 2003  
**Duration:** 55 minutes

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For further information about Film Australia's programmes, contact National Film and Sound Archive of Australia  
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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wilderness.org.au/about/wilderness.html>