



BOB BROWN'S GREEN LIVING

Central Plateau Plunder

An uneconomic proposal threatens Tasmania's alpine beauty.

Tasmania's Central Plateau is the largest alpine area on the island. It is a glaciologist's dream. Look at the roughly grooved boulders beside the Highland Lakes Road at the 900m high on St Patrick's Plains, and you are looking at the ice grinding its way over the plateau in the Ice Age 10,000 years ago.

The 146km Highland Lakes Road, recently fully sealed, provides one of Australia's most picturesque journeys. It is Tasmania's scenic rival to Victoria's Great Ocean Road. Summiting at 1,210m at Pine Lake, this is both Tasmania's highest main road and the only one which passes through a grove of the island's unique pencil pines—that is, when not closed by winter blizzards.

The road skirts yingina (the Great Lake) with signs to the Beaumont Memorial and its studied ignorance of the brutal murders and displacement of the Palawa people, including the lakeside Luggemairrenerpaireir clan, who enjoyed life on the plateau—not least the cider from the now-threatened 'cider gums'—for millennia. The plaque lies that John Beaumont (in 1817) was 'the first to cast his eye and slake his thirst upon this noble inland sea'.

That nonsense can and will be rectified. But harder to fix would be the massive wind farm proposed by Epuron—a North Sydney-based company—on St Patrick's Plains east of yingina. Though Tasmania is self-supplied with 100% renewable energy, Epuron would send wind power through a taxpayer-funded cable, labelled 'Marinus', under Bass Strait to Victoria. Tasmania's Gutwein Liberal government, supported by Labor, is rushing legislation for Tasmania to produce 200 percent (sic) renewable energy. This will facilitate Epuron's Central Plateau project.

Marinus will cost at least \$3.5 billion but there is no agreement as to how

Victoria and Tasmania will share the cost. Victoria is unlikely to pay as its own renewable energy and battery storage options are rapidly expanding. Nor will Epuron. A study for our foundation shows that while wind generation may be a little more productive in Tasmania than Victoria, the gap isn't nearly enough to cover the cost of sending it to Victoria.

Epuron is proceeding with its St Patrick's Plains scheme despite a local group (www.NoTurbineActionGroup.org) organising to oppose the impact on wedgetailed eagles, on the wild experience the plateau offers anglers and bushwalkers, and on the Highland Lakes Road's immediate scenic environs.



The Steppes cottage will be framed by turbines

Epuron's 'farm' will have 67 whirling turbines, dwarfing Tasmania's tallest building, the Wrest Point Casino tower at 57m high. In fact, each of Epuron's 240m high turbines, packed on either side of the Highland Lakes Road, will approach the height of Melbourne's 297m Eureka Tower. Pivoting off 150m high towers, the 90m above-horizon blades will be visible from most high points of the northern sector of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, distracting the eye in every scene. The impact—not mentioned by Epuron or the

government—on wilderness and scenic values for Tasmania will be enormous.

Epuron's map of the project shows 14 wedge-tailed eagle nests in or next to the site. There will be a one kilometre distance limit from any nest by any turbine. Presumably the eagles will be instructed to limit their flying to within one kilometre of their nests.

The Highland Lakes Road's scenic amenity faces death by a thousand cuts. Last year, for example, as a bushfire approached, Tasmania's authorities needlessly bulldozed a dozen ancient roadside eucalypts which I counted as amongst the most beautiful anywhere in Australia. These trees had lived with the Aboriginal people, through the plateau's overgrazing by sheep and cattle a century ago, as well as the ongoing annual agistment of sheep flocks onto the plateau for summer pasture.

Which makes me wonder about the Wilsons who, after the Aboriginal clearance, settled at 'The Steppes'—a reference to Siberia's icy plains—in 1863. James became the Central Plateau's Police Superintendent, and Jessie, known as 'the Lady of the Birds', put out food for birds when snow covered the countryside. The Scots couple 'had a love and understanding of that severe and beautiful country'. They raised five children, and daughter Madge, an artist and sculptor, lived on at The Steppes until near her death in 1975.

Not least due to famed bushwalker (and Madge's friend) Jack Thwaites, The Steppes Cottage is now the beautiful centrepiece of a 48ha state reserve. If Epuron has its way, it will be left squeezed between the Lagoon of Islands to its east and 18 mega-towers to its west. In this age of uglification of the natural planet, one can only conjecture what the Luggemairrenerpaireir, let alone the Wilsons, would have thought of it.