

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

**Evaluation of the cultural character of the proposal
to extend the Tasmanian Wilderness Zone**

In the very vast geographical area of the Tasmanian Wilderness Zone, prehistorians have uncovered a certain number of archaeological sites of great interest. From the Pleistocene to the end of the Ice Age (c. 30,000 - 11,500) communities of hunters and gatherers lived in the interior. From 1000 B.C. until the arrival of the Europeans in the 19th century, Aboriginal tribes lived along the coast.

From the first explorations of the caves and rock shelters and crags that abound in the karstic formations in southern and central Tasmania, a number of habitats and grottoes decorated with pictograms were discovered in 1987. The systematic use of the Carbon 14 method to date charcoals and the study of artifacts made of stone and bone which were found in the layers of the habitats provided interesting information on the people of Tasmania at the end of the Pleistocene age.

Analysis of the pigments used in the rock paintings revealed that human blood was used along with vegetable and mineral pigments. This discovery, reported in 1989 by T.H. Loy and six of his collaborators, is of interest to both anthropology and archeometry because of the future possibilities of dating and assessment that it offers.

From the point of view of prehistoric archaeology, the Tasmanian wilderness constitutes a very promising and potentially important field for study.

The submission in 1989 by the Australian government of a proposal to extend the area for inclusion offers ICOMOS a good opportunity to clarify its position regarding the cultural components of vast natural areas of incontestable value, like Tasmania.

Critical evaluation of those prehistoric sites currently inventoried and explored would inevitably lead to a mitigated conclusion as was the case when the dossier was first examined in 1982. On the one hand, comparison with other rock art sites in cold or subpolar zones -namely in Norway and Patagonia- does not reveal any criteria of unicity or excellence which would tip the balance in favor of Tasmania; on the other hand, comparison with the Aboriginal sites explored since 1981 would not show any ensembles so thoroughly coherent as that of Kakadu Park, just to cite one example.

Yet Tasmania as a whole does appear to be a prodigious cultural reserve and, in view of the particularly interesting relationship that humans developed there throughout the ages with the environment, it is ready for the definition of a coherent research policy on prehistoric anthropology.

It is for this reason that ICOMOS, which was requested to reexamine the dossier in 1983 when the natural reserves in Tasmania faced their

most serious danger, frankly affirms its positive opinion in the absence of any procedure that would allow a property to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in Danger without having first been included on the World Heritage List.

Now, in the very different circumstances of 1989, our opinion is an invitation to reopen an in-depth debate. By recognizing the cultural value of sites within the protection perimeter of vast natural zones, ICOMOS means to protect a potential heritage and constitute archaeological reserves. This long-term policy is not incompatible with the immediate designation of famous archaeological sites whose potential appears to have been exhausted (the Decorated Grottoes of the Vézère Valley, Altamira Cave, site of Zhoukoudian); it should be considered as being directly allied to the policy of the IUCN and natural heritage specialists.

ICOMOS, October 1989