



Fae Robinson
Futures

WEST COAST WILDERNESS CENTRE

Final Report



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December 2021



BACKGROUND

This is the Final Report of a project which examined the opportunity to establish a wilderness education and training capability on Tasmania's West Coast. The project was jointly funded by the Department of Education and West Coast Council.

The project emerged from a conversation about the strengths of the West Coast and its potential to provide local students, the tourism industry and others with adventure and wilderness-related training, as well as unique and challenging outdoor experiences for school groups.

The brief for the project identified the opportunity as follows:

- ▶ 'To scope the need and fit for a coordinated approach and required facilities to the delivery of outdoor education and training to students and adult learners in the region
- ▶ Improved engagement and retention rates for West Coast school students, and an increase of employment opportunities for school students post-school/holidays
- ▶ Increased education, training and employment pathways for West Coast residents and businesses in an area of emerging demand
- ▶ Opportunity to address industry demand and investigate the appropriateness of the support for a physical site for education and training to take place
- ▶ Opportunity to investigate connections between outdoor education and West Coast Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage.¹

Between August and October 2021, research was undertaken to better understand outdoor education and training in Tasmania, the needs of students and adult learners on the West Coast and of the tourism industry, the strengths of the West Coast's location, and possible models or frameworks best suited to the location and the requirements of the Brief. It was essentially a discovery process to explore what, if anything, might be possible.

The research included more than 70 conversations, and desktop enquiry of local, national and international education and training offerings that might provide a feasible model or framework. The diverse range of stakeholders engaged in conversation included primary and secondary school teachers and principals; College and TAFE teachers; University teachers and academics; Aboriginal people and educators; outdoor enthusiasts; outdoor, adventure and Aboriginal tour businesses and industry leaders; Parks and Wildlife officers; artists; Councillors and council staff; and community organisations, local residents, and students.

The results of the research were summarised in a Discussion Paper which recognised the importance of place and West Coast Aboriginal connections to country; provided an overview of the West Coast community and its commitment to innovative education and

¹ Department of Education Tasmania 2021, *Plan on a Page – Feasibility Study – West Coast Wilderness Education and Training Strategy – Draft 13/7/21*



training solutions; and described current practice in outdoor education and training in Tasmania, both for school students and those seeking jobs in the outdoor/adventure tourism sector. Government advisory structures essential to any future development were also described. Five options, all based around wilderness, were presented to progress the conversation, as well as six case studies of successful outdoor education and training organisations operating around the world, each with its own unique history, distinct purpose, and for five of the six, community-led governance.

The introduction to the Discussion Paper posed a key question:

Is a West Coast Wilderness immersive learning experience an opportunity whose time has come?

This Final Report presents a case for a “West Coast Wilderness immersive learning experience” based on the findings of the research and the deliberations of a workshop held in Queenstown on 10 November 2021. The Report describes the potential and suggests a way forward to realise it.

Fae Robinson
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I acknowledge the Palawa people as the original and traditional owners and continuing custodians of lutrawita / Tasmania. I commit to working respectfully to honour their ongoing spiritual and cultural connections to this land.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wilderness West Coast: A Discussion Paper revealed:

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1. West Coast wilderness is internationally acclaimed and provides the opportunity for a new type of engagement that can benefit local communities.
2. There is evidence of over 35,000 years' Aboriginal habitation and there is keen interest from local Aboriginal people to be part of an education and training capability.
3. There is concern about the future for young people on the West Coast as mining jobs decline and there are limited opportunities in other industries. There is also an expressed desire for the West Coast to be a learning community and to retain young people through education provision and employment and training opportunities.
4. West Coast Council has recognised the wilderness as a unique opportunity and strength and has invested in new adventure sports-related infrastructure. Capitalising on these unique qualities with appropriate education and training provision can offer experiences that local young people, and adult learners, can connect to.
5. Schools engaged in the research expressed an appetite for an outdoor/adventure location for multi-day excursions; independent schools were more likely to find it affordable. Distance, cost and risk were cited as possible barriers, particularly for state schools. The research also revealed a significant increase in enrolments in outdoor education across all school sectors.
6. Current training for outdoor/adventure guides is very limited in Tasmania, and there is industry demand for delivery of accredited guiding training to better meet its needs. Revitalised guiding training offers the opportunity for Tasmania to recapture its national reputation as a high quality training provider in outdoor tour guiding.
7. The University of Tasmania recognises an appropriate wilderness centre would provide opportunities for students in a range of disciplines to experience immersive learning; senior staff welcomed the concept.
8. Training to qualify at instructor level in many adventure sports is currently delivered by professional associations and can be intermittent. It was previously offered by TAFE and there is increasing demand for more professional instructor-level training.
9. The Case Studies of outdoor/adventure education and training organisations revealed some common success factors: a strong vision, being mission-driven, diverse product offerings, knowledge of their markets, wilderness as a classroom, commitment to community, generally non-profit status, and gradual evolution to realise success.



The Workshop revealed:

10. 'Wilderness as a classroom' harnesses the West Coast's greatest asset as a learning experience.
11. To succeed, any facility or capability needs to be a scalable multi-purpose centre that offers a portfolio of place-based experiences designed for clearly segmented client groups. It must be driven by strong, inspirational, entrepreneurial leadership with the ability to build long-term relationships, supported by highly skilled trainers.
12. A centre will need a local focus and a governance model that connects with community.

Study Findings

The wilderness is a West Coast strength but to harness it for now and future generations requires creative and bold new thinking. With creativity and new thinking, a wilderness education and training centre can realise the twin desires of the West Coast as a learning community and to retain more young people at school and with careers on the West Coast.

A multi-purpose centre is recommended as the preferred model. The purpose of the centre is to develop, market and coordinate delivery of tailored wilderness/adventure learning experiences to a range of market segments and local students. For the first two years it is envisaged the centre will deliver coordinated services from town premises.

Priorities for the centre's Director are genuine, authentic engagement with the West Coast community including the Aboriginal community, and developing strong linkages with local schools, the Study Centre, TasTAFE, other Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), the University of Tasmania, and professional training associations.

This foundational work is essential to realise the benefits of any capital investment in a purpose-built, scalable West Coast Wilderness Centre if federal funding is secured.



DISCUSSION PAPER RECAP AND FINDINGS

What is the answer the key question posed in the Discussion Paper - *Is a West Coast Wilderness immersive learning experience an opportunity whose time has come?*

In each of its Sections, the Discussion Paper explored different dimensions of this question, providing a narrative and posing a focusing question to help tease out the insights needed to establish the feasibility of a West Coast Wilderness immersive learning experience.

Section 1 identified the West Coast as a unique and special place and provided background to local communities, including West Coast Aboriginal connections to country.

Section 2 described the West Coast community's commitment to innovative educational provision and local education and adventure initiatives.

Section 3 provided background to the role of, and engagement with, outdoor education by schools and students.

Section 4 considered industry perspectives and vocational training opportunities for students looking to the adventure tourism industry for jobs and careers.

Section 5 looked at the essentials for any Wilderness West Coast model and presented five bold ideas for consideration and discussion.

Section 6 provided insight into Government advisory structures which will need to be engaged in future conversations.

Discussion Paper Section 1: The West Coast Landscape – Recap and Findings

FOCUSING QUESTION

The West Coast has extraordinary wild landscapes, millennia of Indigenous habitation and complex changing communities.

How can West Coast communities best live, and learn in and with, the landscape as a 'nourishing terrain'?

Recap of Discussion Paper

- ▶ Wilderness defines a significant part of the West Coast landscape – much of it is included in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) because it conserves a diverse array of both natural and cultural features of outstanding global significance. Other parts are set aside as conservation areas and reserves or are themselves spectacular and rugged.



- ▶ The TWWHA has been occupied by Aboriginal people for more than 35,000 years² and local Aboriginal people have a deep connection to country. Country is defined by researcher, Deborah Bird Rose as 'a nourishing terrain... a place that gives and receives life... it is lived in and lived with'.³
- ▶ From an employment perspective, the West Coast has traditionally been known for 'mining and pining', but changes to mining practices have significantly reduced job opportunities. Employment has increased in the agriculture, farming and fishing sector but not enough to offset losses in the mining industry.
- ▶ Population numbers are plateauing, largely due to the arrival of people aged over 50, following a period of steep decline; some families still choose to leave, generally when children reach high school age.
- ▶ A major branding exercise conducted in 2018 described the West Coast as 'The Clash between "Mankind" and Mother Nature'⁴; thematic imagery was developed for the five West Coast townships – Queenstown, Rosebery, Tullah, Zeehan and Strahan.
- ▶ Case Study 1: The Unconformity demonstrated the resourcefulness of the West Coast community, it's appetite for risk, it's connections to community and landscape, and the importance of community-led governance.

Findings

1. **Wilderness is an internationally recognised strength of the West Coast** – tourism operators have built successful businesses by acknowledging and understanding its intrinsic values.
2. **Wilderness is a natural asset that connects people to place** just like mining, pining and aquaculture have done and some are still doing – it can be a truly 'nourishing terrain' that brings new prosperity to the West Coast.
3. **The West Coast Aboriginal community has a long history and deep connections to country** which provide opportunities for a shared and deeper understanding of the West Coast's unique natural landscapes.
4. **New career prospects are possible** by focusing on wilderness as an 'immersive learning experience' in ways that expand opportunities for local communities beyond mining, forestry, aquaculture, and tourism.
5. **Individual township histories and identities are integral** – place-based wilderness immersive learning experiences can connect and deliver benefits to local communities and showcase local and Tasmanian brands.

² Natural and Cultural Heritage, 2017, *Aboriginal Heritage of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) A literature review and synthesis*, Department of Primary Industry, Parks, Water and Environment, Tasmanian Government, Hobart, p6

³ Rose Deborah Bird 1996, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p7

⁴ <https://www.forthethepeople.agency/work/west-coast-tasmania>, accessed 21_08_2021



6. The Unconformity shows it can be done – its strong community focus and commitment to being ‘a catalyst for change, shifting our reliance from traditional industries...’⁵ aligns with the potential of a wilderness education and training capability.
7. Authentic engagement of community is essential to success.

Discussion Paper Section 2: Community Commitment to Education – Recap and Findings

FOCUSING QUESTION

Innovation and a community of learners are West Coast core values, and activities that connect community and visitors to landscape are increasing.

How can Wilderness West Coast best deliver innovative, relevant, coordinated learning pathways?

Recap of Discussion Paper

- ▶ West Coast’s 2025 Community Plan’s vision for education is: *To be a Community of Learners* through innovative education, employment and training provision.⁶
- ▶ The Education and Training Committee (ETC) advises Council on matters relating to education and training and were instrumental in the creation of the Study Hub.
- ▶ The Study Hub provides support to adult learners on the West Coast, and delivers non-accredited training tailored to industry needs.
- ▶ Council’s Corporate Plan requires it to ‘encourage and advocate for local provision of accessible and industry-relevant training opportunities’, and to ‘advocate for and promote the unique opportunities and strengths of the West Coast’.⁷ It has recently completed a *Mountain Bike Trail Strategy* and construction of mountain bike trails and commissioned a West Coast Walks strategy and Climbing Catalyst project.

Findings

1. The West Coast community wants innovative education and training opportunities – this is explicitly expressed in the Community Plan and supports the vision of ‘A Community of Learners’.

⁵ The Unconformity, *The Unconformity 2020-2025*, , ‘Our genesis’ p4

⁶ West Coast Council 2020, *2025 West Coast Community Plan, Mid-term Review Supplement*.

⁷ West Coast Council, *Corporate Plan 2020-2030*



2. The West Coast Council wants local provision of training to leverage the opportunities and strengths of the West Coast including new adventure-related infrastructure and eco-tourism.
3. The Study Hub will be an important part of a networked approach providing non-accredited training, as well as support to local students to achieve their education dreams.
4. Wilderness immersive learning experiences provide new prospects for education, employment, and training provision – they build on the opportunities and strengths of the West Coast.

Discussion Paper Section 3: Outdoor Education in Schools – Recap and Findings

FOCUSING QUESTION

Teachers and students highly value outdoor education, identify extraordinary benefits and numbers are growing.

Could Wilderness West Coast be a sustainable world-class facility that offers nationally recognised wilderness experiences for students, including for local learners?

Recap of Discussion Paper

- ▶ Outdoor education is valued by principals and teachers and many have a tradition of providing outdoor experiences to students. There are more than 20 outdoor camps in Tasmania where students stay from overnight to seven days.
- ▶ Travel time to the West Coast, cost – especially for state schools – and complying with departmental risk management requirements were reported as barriers to schools engaging in outdoor experiences on the West Coast. Private providers in Tasmania offer a range of outdoor education services that help address these barriers and make provision easier for teachers and schools, but they come at a cost.
- ▶ Two of the three outdoor education courses accredited by the Office of Tasmanian Assessments and Standards Certification (TASC) offered in Tasmanian schools have seen large increases in student enrolments between 2017 and 2021 – Outdoor Education more than 500% and Outdoor Leadership more than 100%. Similarly, enrolments in Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation offered in six colleges increased from two to 52 between 2017 and 2020.
- ▶ Schools in rural and regional Tasmania have challenges in securing outdoor education teachers and some community members perceive outdoor education as



‘a bludge subject’ that doesn’t lead to jobs or a career. Both Mountain Heights School in Queenstown and Rosebery District School have recently had outdoor education programs with strong student support, although retention of teachers is challenging.

- ▶ Victoria and New South Wales have significant commitments to outdoor education and a Tasmanian outdoor education strategy would help support further engagement by Tasmanian schools.
- ▶ Case Study 2: Mount Cameron Field Study Centre demonstrated community commitment and ownership, and collaborative relationships as key to its continuing operation. The full-time resident teacher is essential to the successful operation of the Centre, as is the separate funding of the position and delivery of key maintenance by the Department of Education.

Findings

1. **Schools highly value outdoor education experiences and a West Coast wilderness immersive learning experience can expose students to new and different adventure pursuits** – big mountain and back-country trail bike riding, bouldering and climbing, bushwalking, whitewater and flatwater rafting, for example, as well as deep learning about Aboriginal and non-indigenous history and heritage, and the diverse array of natural and cultural features of outstanding global significance.
2. **There is potential to attract school groups from across Tasmania and around Australia** by facilitating high quality, well-marketed place-based wilderness learning experiences. They will be important market segments for any future facility.
3. **Facilitated programs developed in collaboration with schools** can connect adventure pursuits and learning experiences to personal development like building resilience and accepting challenges, understanding team membership, and leadership.
4. **Requirements of TASC-accredited outdoor education subjects can be met** through immersive adventure-related learning experiences on the West Coast, for example, expedition-related and other programs that count towards the TCE score.
5. **Local knowledge and creative solutions can address perceived barriers and change mindsets**, for example, by making the journey part of the experience, collaborating with schools on risk management, and facilitating, and later providing, solutions for cost-effective accommodation.
6. **Local ownership offers new opportunities for local students** through new experiences, role modelling and scholarships. A new wilderness education and training capability can ‘reach-in’ to local schools and provide outreach to others.
7. **The success of an outdoor education and training capability can be achieved** by increasing parent and community understanding of the value of outdoor education, developing career pathways that better articulate course progression between



school and VET, and funding of schools to undertake increased outdoor education to build personal, team and leadership capabilities. Development of a Tasmanian Outdoor Education Strategy, and some associated funding would support the increase in interest in outdoor education across the State.

Discussion Paper Section 4: Vocational and Tertiary Outdoor Education – Recap and Findings

FOCUSING QUESTION

Adventure guiding is a specialised occupation that requires ongoing training and accreditation which can be difficult to source in Tasmania.

How can Wilderness West Coast complement TasTAFE and add value to the associations by offering specialist certified training? What other wilderness training and experiences might it offer?

Recap of Discussion Paper

- ▶ There are six national VET-accredited training courses for outdoor recreation and tour guiding. Only two are currently available in Tasmania.
- ▶ TasTAFE currently offers three short courses for tour guides none of which are accredited. These courses are designed for specific jobs but industry participating in this research generally preferred guides with Certificate III or IV in Guiding.
- ▶ The University of Tasmania offers a Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Master of Tourism, Environmental and Cultural Heritage; students currently do an intensive program at Cradle Mountain.
- ▶ A number of professional associations offer guide and instructor training in specialist disciplines but courses can be infrequent. Disciplines include mountain biking, paddling, climbing and technical rescue programs.
- ▶ Case Study 3: National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) demonstrated the importance of passion in establishing the School, using wilderness as its classroom, offering specialist training and diverse activities including conferences, academic and executive leadership programs. NOLS works in partnership with its community.
- ▶ Case Study 4: Pure Exploration demonstrated the power of international positioning and qualifications, and combining adventure travel with different types and levels of training – adventure guiding, expedition leadership, and outdoor instructor training. The Case Study suggests there is a demand for these courses even at significant cost.



Key Learnings

1. **Tasmania has historically enjoyed a strong reputation in the provision of vocational outdoor education and training** – highly regarded TasTAFE staff provided accredited Certificate III and IV training, including in professional disciplines.
2. **There is a gap in the market** – TasTAFE no longer delivers accredited training. Nationally and internationally accredited training in adventure guiding, and professional and technical rescue disciplines to instructor level will form an important part of a portfolio of wilderness immersive learning experiences.
3. **International accredited courses could attract national and potentially international students** as demonstrated by the Pure Exploration case study; the courses would support local placement of highly qualified tour guides during the Tasmanian summer, with migration to Northern Hemisphere locations during the Tasmanian winter providing sustainable career options.
4. **High quality staff would help build the reputation of the West Coast as *the* place for training in adventure-related wilderness disciplines** and contribute to rebuilding Tasmania's reputation and positioning.
5. **The West Coast wilderness experience could replace the immersive learning experiences conducted by the University of Tasmania** at Cradle Mountain. The University has also indicated there are opportunities for students of other courses, to use the West Coast wilderness as an immersive learning opportunity, for example, MBA, geology, environmental studies, Aboriginal studies.
6. **It will be essential for the West Coast to be clear about its value proposition and competitive advantage** to effectively position itself in the wilderness outdoor education, training and development space.

Discussion Paper Section 5: Considering Options – The Essentials and The Inspiration – Recap and Findings

FOCUSING QUESTION

There are some essentials, models and ideas to explore in considering the shape of Wilderness West Coast.

Do any of these ideas provide the basis for further exploration, or do you have a big idea of your own to share?



Recap of Discussion Paper

- ▶ West Coast wilderness locations create the possibilities and connections to place and communities.
- ▶ Seven key requirements were identified for successful development of a wilderness education and training capability. These are community connections, leadership, passion, accommodation, transport, equipment and internet access.
- ▶ Possible models included joint venture, various options for community management, or the West Coast Wilderness Railway model of Government management.
- ▶ A Wilderness Lab, with visionary leadership and dynamic cross sectoral membership, was offered as an option to investigate and develop a sustainable model for education and training on the West Coast.
- ▶ Five ideas – The Lake, The Basin, The Town, The Linda Option, and The Wilderness Multipurpose Centre – were analysed for their strengths, dependencies and downsides to underpin the workshop conversation.
- ▶ Case Study 5: Plas Y Brenin demonstrated the value of a national centre catering for a diversity of client groups; it has a long-term strategy and evolutionary approach. It is owned by Sport England, is a not-for-profit charity and is led by a multi-skilled CEO with a business background.
- ▶ Case Study 6: Colorado Outdoor Education Center demonstrated passion, a mission-driven approach, diverse facilities and users, and continual evolution.

Findings

1. **A genuine wilderness learning experience that harnesses the strengths of the West Coast landscape** is a strong central organising idea for the development of an education and training capability.
2. **The site will be important – it needs to relate to wilderness and community.** The Linda Valley and Lake Margaret offer opportunities. Other greenfield sites could be explored.
3. **There is a lot to consider in order to land the most appropriate model and governance structure** for a new education and training capability to achieve long-term success. Possible models, especially ones that might attract private or philanthropic capital, need to be explored.
4. **A Wilderness Centre could be quickly established in temporary premises** with the specific purpose of actively engaging with communities and schools, partnering with the Study Hub and building longer-term relationships with industry, the outdoor education community and organisations needing high quality search and rescue training in difficult terrain, for example, Police, Antarctic Division, SES, Parks and Wildlife Service, Ambulance.



5. **Key requirements for a new purpose-build Wilderness Centre** include accommodation with communal kitchen, outdoor equipment and storage, learning space with community and internet access, and transport.
6. **The Centre will need cross-sectoral leadership and guidance** from adventure practitioners, and arts, industry and local government.

Discussion Paper Section 6: Advisory Groups – Recap and Findings

FOCUSING QUESTION

The Tasmanian Government and key stakeholders are taking a keen interest in tourism education and training.

How and when do we engage with these stakeholder committees?

Recap of Discussion Paper

- ▶ The *T21 Visitor Economy Action Plan 2020-2022* sets out long term aspirations which generally align with a West Coast wilderness education and training capability.
- ▶ The Action Plan is governed by the Premier's Visitor Economy Advisory Council with the highest level government and industry membership, and a Steering Committee that oversees and coordinates delivery and reporting on the Plan.
- ▶ A Ministerial Tourism and Hospitality Workforce Advisory Committee advises the Minister for Tourism on all matters relating to training and workforce development in tourism and hospitality.

Findings

1. It is **essential to engage both strategically and tactically with key government decision makers** to pitch the ideas and gain support and funding.
2. A **Prospectus will provide these key stakeholders with a more concrete and practical understanding** of a proposed West Coast Wilderness Centre and the process to arrive at the best possible model.
3. A **Prospectus is also important** to developing relationships and attracting support from the private sector and philanthropists.



WORKSHOP FINDINGS

Twenty (20) key stakeholders gathered in Queenstown on 10 November 2021 to explore the possibilities of establishing an education and training capability on the West Coast. Participants had received the Discussion Paper as pre-reading for the workshop and were invited to test the opportunity to establish a wilderness-related capability.

Workshop groups tested five questions:

1. Will *wilderness* work as a central, organising idea?
2. What are the essentials to create a world class facility?
3. What would it look like and where would it be located?
4. What model of governance will underpin success?
5. What are the risks and how can they be mitigated?

1. Will *wilderness* work as a central, organising idea?

Wilderness was seen as a broad and flexible concept, relevant to place, and 'not polarising'. It is the West Coast's greatest asset. The inclusion of culture, and addition of 'experience', added a human dimension to make it 'integrated, interactive and connected'.

2. What are the essentials to create a world class facility?

Four essentials emerged from the groups:

- ▶ Authentically place-based, exemplifying its Tasmanian DNA and branding and connection to the West Coast landscape and culture – a unique, iconic experience that 'could only happen here'.
- ▶ Gravitas and reputation built with the best people in the business.
- ▶ Strongly linked to community.
- ▶ A collaborative model with a defined purpose, the right leader, and understanding of its markets (segmentation), offering an immersive experience with wilderness as the classroom; not necessarily a facility.

3. What would it look like and where would it be located?

A common theme was the concept of 'not one place' – an urban and wilderness experience where arrival was part of the ritual and connections to the wilderness were curated through clever segmentation – 'go where the experience is'.

One group painted a picture of a foundation model connecting education, experience and community. The model would be a decentralised, bespoke capability – the West Coast is the destination – with a coordinator showcasing wilderness, attracting 'drawcard names', and building economic linkages. It could only be in Tasmania as the 'last natural place' – a 40° South experience with connections to the TWWHA.



The group envisaged stories that would convey the essence of what's special and different about the West Coast, and its local culture... experiences could include corporate executives mingling with local young people and the Aboriginal community, and tailored adventure pursuits for defined groups.

The group also identified the need for further research to clarify the opportunity – 'have we identified what we've got?' – and to understand the potential positioning of any capability with its target markets.

Possible locations suggested by the groups included the Linda Valley, Tullah, Cape Sorell Lighthouse and Lake Margaret.

4. What model of governance will underpin success?

Four models emerged from the groups:

- ▶ A not-for-profit, for-purpose model possibly co-created with community.
- ▶ A public/private partnership with government as partners but also recognising that 'government cannot be as innovative as this needs to be'.
- ▶ Private-sector driven with a corporate structure.
- ▶ The model needs to be visionary, scalable and flexible driven by a skills-based board.

5. What are the risks and how can they be mitigated?

Three key risks were identified across the groups:

- ▶ Financial viability and funding, especially funding of operations – mitigation included scalability, flexibility, appropriate model and governance structures, and getting short-term wins – 'runs on the board'.
- ▶ A weak vision and poor leadership that fails to understand its markets and build brand and reputation – mitigation included 'headhunting' a leader, attracting drawcard names, undertaking market segmentation and staying true to Tasmanian stories and brand.
- ▶ Securing best quality staff – mitigation included a scalable model, establishing reputation and providing accommodation.

Other risks included availability of medical infrastructure (mitigation – wilderness first aid and access to Medivac), lack of community buy-in (connections and engagement), weather, intertown rivalry (ownership by region, creation of West Coast 'Camino', miners walks, training for locals), availability of accommodation, and elitism.

Addressing the essentials, and developing a fit-for-purpose model and governance structure with strong leadership are key to mitigation of risks.



Final Thoughts from Workshop Participants

It needs a local focus

- ▶ Demonstrate benefits and create connections to local businesses and local education providers
- ▶ Train West Coast locals and Tasmanians – support them to upskill
- ▶ Open the world to local kids
- ▶ 'Crow' West Coast – use strengths, unique benefits; what could we do that's amazing that gives local kids a sense of pride?
- ▶ Co-create with community – create local ownership
- ▶ Learn from the experience of The Unconformity

The project needs to be scalable

- ▶ Make the project scalable – pathway to ultimate aims, models for operational funding
- ▶ Develop a Prospectus to float the concept – who to do, who to fund?
- ▶ Create a rock solid business plan with funding for 10 years
- ▶ Create two centres – urban with teaching focus (eg Mt Lyell Mine Office), plus a Wilderness Centre
- ▶ Any facility needs to be environmental, carbon neutral, unique
- ▶ Begin by creating a Wilderness Lab

The project needs strong leadership

- ▶ A project driver and project partners are both needed with appropriate governance to allow partnerships to develop, function and flourish
- ▶ Fund a project manager (Jobs Tasmania?)
- ▶ Headhunt people

Summary of Findings

1. 'Wilderness as classroom' harnesses the West Coast's greatest asset as a learning experience.
2. To succeed, any facility or capability needs to be a multi-purpose centre that offers a portfolio of place-based experiences designed for clearly segmented client groups.
3. A centre must be driven by strong, inspirational, entrepreneurial leadership with the ability to build long-term relationships, supported by highly skilled trainers.
4. A centre needs a governance model that connects with community.
5. A centre needs to be scalable – create a vision, start small, and grow over time.



THE TASMANIAN BRAND

The Tasmanian brand is encapsulated in a headline on the Tasmanian.com.au website that reads: *Being Tasmanian is the quiet pursuit of the extraordinary*. The story describes the essence of living, working, visiting, studying or investing in Tasmania:

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'Live in Tasmania

It's different here, from the cleanest air in the world to a culture of invention and connectedness that inspires us all to pursue a more meaningful life.

Work in Tasmania

We can't promise it will be easy, but this is an unusually fine place to make your passion the core of your career. You'll spend more time doing what you love, both in your work and when you are free.

Visit Tasmania

In a world that is increasingly bland and exhausting, we invite you to our land and our culture – slow down, connect to what matters, and feel more human.

Study in Tasmania

This place is a workshop for new ideas and small enterprises, and no matter what you study – from marine science to philosophy, sculpture to renewable energy – thinking Tasmanian means you'll be ready to take your passion to the world.

Invest in Tasmania

Everything we build in Tasmania is special, thanks to a culture of invention and quality earned through isolation. And when you build it Tasmanian, you build it renewable.⁸

Many of these ideas represent the West Coast and the potential of wilderness immersive learning experiences – *...a culture of invention and connectedness that inspires us all to pursue a more meaningful life... make our passion the core of your career... doing what you love, both in your work and when you are free... connect to what matters, and feel more human... a workshop for new ideas and small enterprise ... invention and quality earned through isolation.*

The right education and training capability and immersive learning experiences have the ability to capitalise on these Tasmanian strengths.

⁸ <https://tasmanian.com.au/>, accessed 08_12_2021



A PREFERRED MODEL – WEST COAST WILDERNESS CENTRE

A hub or multi-purpose model is the preferred model; its working title is West Coast Wilderness Centre (WCWC or the Centre). It is a bold idea that will require operational funding in its first two years of development, and capital funding for a permanent centre.

For the first two years, it is envisaged the Centre will deliver coordinated education and training services from town premises, using the wilderness as a classroom. Services will move to a new permanent home if construction of a purpose-built, scalable West Coast Wilderness Centre is funded.

The research found there is strong interest in a wilderness education and training capability on Tasmania's West Coast and international examples of successful wilderness outdoor education and training centres demonstrated the potential for a centre to build a national and international reputation.

West Coast Wilderness Centre – Coordinated education and training services in town premises in the first two years

Centre Purpose

1. The purpose of the WCWC is to develop, market and coordinate delivery of tailored wilderness/adventure learning experiences to a range of market segments and local students. Services will be initially coordinated from a central location on the West Coast.
2. The coordinated, tailored services could include:
 - a. School group programs – finding accommodation, identifying and supporting adventure and cultural activities and learning opportunities, helping teachers fulfil risk requirements etc.
 - b. Accredited training for outdoor and adventure guides – sourcing instructor/s and learning space/s, facilitating and supporting delivery of practical outdoor/adventure experiences, ensuring requirements of VET accreditation are met etc.
 - c. Accredited instructor training in adventure disciplines – rock climbing, whitewater rafting and mountain biking etc.
 - d. Internationally accredited training – for example, Rescue 3
 - e. Specialist training – for example, wilderness first aid.

Centre Leadership

1. Two types of leadership will be needed to establish and coordinate Centre services and achieve its Purpose.
 - a. A small 'ginger group' to lead establishment of the Centre. A ginger group is 'a group of people... who try to encourage other people to follow a new,



more interesting, or more active way of doing things'. This WCWC Leadership Group should include adventure practitioners, and representatives from arts, industry, Aboriginal community and local government. Its priority will be to recruit a Centre Director.

- b. **A dynamic Centre Director with vision, adventure sport qualifications and business experience** and the ability to build exceptional relationships and funding partnerships.
2. **The Leadership Group** will be responsible for:
 - a. Developing a Prospectus that clearly outlines the project
 - b. Advocating for the project to the Premier's Visitor Economy Advisory Council, T21 Steering Committee, Ministerial Tourism and Hospitality Workforce Advisory Committee and others as appropriate, for example, Department of State Growth, VXT (Visitor Experience Training).
 - c. Establishing a partnering arrangement with a State Government agency, for example, Department of State Growth (West Coast Wilderness Railway has an established relationship and governance arrangement) or the Division of Communities, Sport and Recreation of the Department of Communities (Plas Y Brenin is owned by Sport England and managed by a Trust).
 3. **The Director** will work with the Leadership Group to:
 - a. Develop an effective on-going governance structure for the Centre.
 - b. Identify operating space for the first two years.
 - c. Develop a five-year business plan.
 - d. Develop and support delivery of a 'blueprint' for the permanent West Coast Wilderness Centre inclusive of all key requirements.

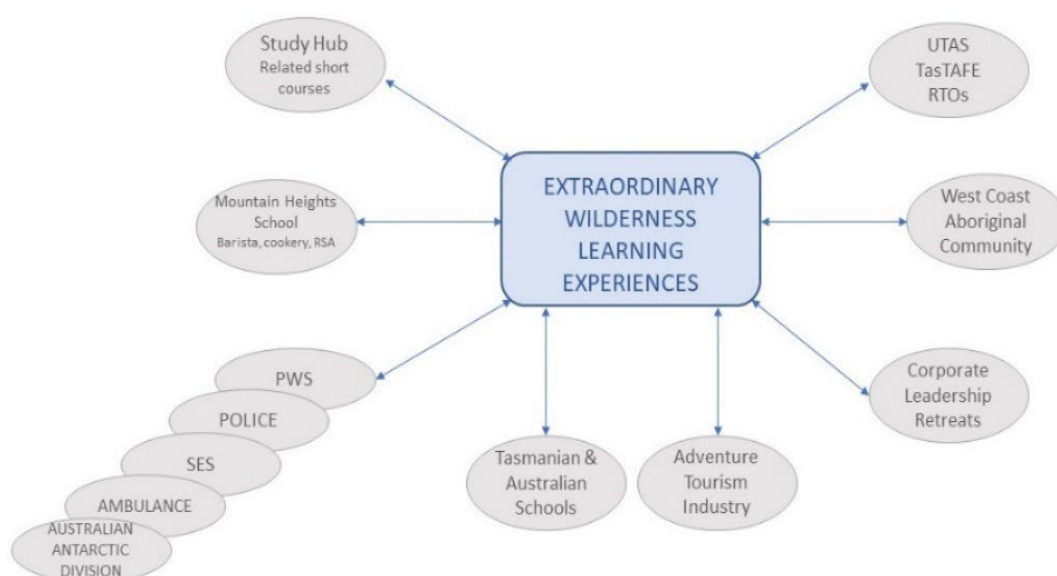
Community Connections & Networks

1. **Genuine, authentic engagement with West Coast communities** will be an early priority for the Director.
 - a. Consideration could be given to establishing a shopfront location providing visibility and access for community members while a permanent facility is being established. The Parks and Wildlife Service are also considering their options for community engagement relating to the new iconic walk in the Tyndall Ranges. There may be an opportunity to partner with PWS to establish a shopfront presence.
 - b. Early and visible actions, like convening community conversations, offering community open days, and creating connections through community groups like Men's Sheds, Neighbourhood Houses and others, will help provide the community with confidence in the Centre.



2. Strong linkages with local schools and the Study Centre are essential.
 - a. Creating linkages to local schools will demonstrate new learning pathways and potential outdoor careers for local students. Activities might include supporting teachers from Mountain Heights School and Rosebery District School on adventure excursions, and engaging with students about career possibilities and in the operation of the Centre.
 - b. Coordinating outdoor education and adventure-related training with the Study Hub will build on the strengths of both organisations – WCWC offering accredited training and the Study Hub offering non-accredited short courses.
3. Strong linkages with the VET sector including TasTAFE and RTOs, University, professional training associations and the local Aboriginal community are essential. These linkages will demonstrate a diversity of career opportunities and learning pathways for local students to consider.

MULTI-PURPOSE, MULTI-POSSIBILITIES



Opportunities for linkages

- a. Accredited outdoor/adventure tour guiding training that aligns with industry need will differentiate WCWC training from training currently offered in Tasmania. There is an opportunity to re-establish Tasmania's reputation for high quality training in this discipline.
- b. The University has expressed support for a wilderness concept that allows off-site immersive education for cohorts of students, for example, MBA students.



- c. Partnering with professional associations like the Tasmanian Climbing Instructors Association, Paddle Tasmania and others can provide more frequent specialised training to a national audience.
- d. Partnering with the local Aboriginal community will bring at least 35,000 years of history alive and provide an even greater sense of place.

Centre Requirements in the first two years

1. **Learning space with internet access** suitably equipped for school groups, VET students, other groups seeking immersive learning experiences and potentially for community use. This could be part of a 'shop front' facility, or for example, the first floor of the post office building in Queenstown.
2. Access to **a bus suitable for transporting small groups** eg, VET students doing accredited guiding training, specialist training groups.
3. **Equipment and storage**, eg kayaks, ropes, mountain bikes etc.
4. **Accommodation** for the Director if not a local, most likely off-site in rented accommodation.

Development Opportunities

1. **To build momentum, presence and engagement with WCWC**, opportunities that could be considered include:
 - a. A Churchill Fellowship-type international tour for the Director to some or all of the case study locations described in the Discussion Paper, and to others as identified (eg Banff). This would provide in-depth understanding of the most effective operational and governance structures and insight into revenue/funding implications for WCWC. This could possibly be funded by a consortium of West Coast mining companies or a Churchill Fellowship. A tour may also act as an incentive for a suitably qualified person to relocate to the West Coast if the successful candidate is not already resident.
 - b. A Wilderness Researcher-in-Residence program could attract a diversity of applicants from a range of disciplines – geology, ecology, environmental studies, Aboriginal studies, and so on. The rotating resident researcher would be required to reach-in to local schools providing new insights to career options and identifying new learning pathways for local students.
 - c. A bi-annual Wilderness Symposium with drawcard guests held in alternate years to The Unconformity festival could be instrumental in building the profile and awareness and the national and international reputation needed to sustain the Centre. The drawcard guests would be encouraged to reach-in to local schools.



A Permanent West Coast Wilderness Centre

Centre Purpose

The purpose of constructing a West Coast Wilderness Centre is to provide a permanent and flexible base to increase delivery of tailored wilderness/adventure learning experiences to a wider range of market segments and local students, as well as to provide on-site accommodation and integrated services.

The scalable centre will evolve to offer a range of accommodation and immersive learning experiences ranging from school groups and outdoor/adventure students to corporate groups, world renowned adventurers and a Wilderness Researchers-in-Residence.

The Director will continue to build relationships and partnerships, link to schools, the Study Hub and communities, and provide national leadership in outdoor/adventure learning experiences.

Centre Options

There are two options for development of a permanent wilderness multi-purpose Centre.

1. **Option 1: Purchase and repurpose Lake Margaret village.** This option is attractive as the village is only 20 minutes from Queenstown and services, has historical connections to the region, and repurposes existing facilities including:
 - a. Several cottages in need of renovation for teacher/trainer/Director accommodation
 - b. Former single men's quarters for repurposing to bunk-style accommodation and a communal kitchen for school groups, VET students and others using the site for wilderness experiences
 - c. Large community centre repurposed for learning/training experiences and community use – will need internet access.
 - d. An equipment storage facility may need to be constructed.



Lake Margaret Village



2. **Option 2: Identification and purchase of an appropriate 'wilderness' site** to be large enough to allow the Centre to scale up as it becomes established and recognised. The Linda Valley is one option that offers proximity to Queenstown and to a range of adventure-related activities.

A scalable, flexible design will allow future development of a range of accommodation options, one of which could be a partnership with the planned restoration of the historic Linda Royal Hotel for upmarket accommodation for corporate groups.

The first phase of construction of a purpose-built Centre would need to include:

- a. Accommodation, initially for approximately 24 people in a bunkroom style (Three Capes Track accommodation may provide a blueprint) suitable for school groups, VET students and others undertaking accredited guiding training or seeking immersive wilderness learning experiences.
- b. Accommodation for trainers, supervising teacher/s and possibly accommodation for Centre Director (S/he will initially be accommodated in a town while facility is being constructed.)
- c. Communal kitchen suitable for school, training and community use.
- d. Large learning space suitably equipped, including internet access, for all types of groups and community use.
- e. Storage facilities for adventure equipment – kayaks, ropes, mountain bikes etc.



Royal Hotel Linda



ALIGNMENT TO PROJECT BRIEF

The Discussion Paper and this Final Report demonstrate that a multi-purpose Centre that leverages the intrinsic value of wilderness and adventure for learning, that has visionary leadership, appeals to a range of market segments, and connects strongly to local schools, Study Hub and communities, can succeed.

More specifically, the proposed approach meets the five criteria of the Project Brief as follows:

- ▶ *To scope the need and fit for a coordinated approach and required facilities to the delivery of outdoor education and training to students and adult learners in the region*

The WCWC will provide students and adult learners with a wide range of outdoor and adventure-related learning opportunities. It will:

- Reach-in to local schools to provide practical support and professional expertise to expand provision of outdoor education.

The presence of a world-class training facility staffed with highly qualified trainers, and the increasing development of outdoor activities on the West Coast, have the potential to attract outdoor teachers to local schools as a matter of choice.

- Offer opportunities for all learners to engage in training in outdoor pursuits through coordinated service provision with schools.
- Offer students and adult learners opportunities to use WCWC and its facilities and expertise, particularly once a permanent facility is established.

- ▶ *Improved engagement and retention rates for West Coast school students, and an increase of employment opportunities for school students post-school/holidays*

The vision for the Centre is to become a focal point for outdoor/adventure-based training in Tasmania attracting local, state, national and international students. This increased activity will provide a clear line of sight to the possibilities offered by completing outdoor education qualifications, and by staying in the region for employment.

Increased visitation by students and others will offer opportunities for local students to work in tourism and hospitality, and to consider operating their own businesses. Enterprise learning and increased barista and other hospitality training can be offered at Mountain Heights School using the Skills Training Centre.

- ▶ *Increased education, training and employment pathways for West Coast residents and businesses in an area of emerging demand*

The WCWC will provide visibility to a range of education, training and employment pathways for West Coast residents and businesses. Not all the pathways will be lineal or traditional – by coordinating a range of services to a range of target markets, WCWC



will throw light on a range of pathway opportunities. These could include catering and hospitality services, professional adventurer, outdoor/adventure tour guide, researcher, transport specialist, and other wilderness related opportunities like ecology, geology, environmental studies, and Aboriginal studies.

- ▶ *Opportunity to address industry demand and investigate the appropriateness of the support for a physical site for education and training to take place*

The research revealed a clear demand for outdoor/adventure tour guides with accredited training qualifications. The research also revealed a shortage of accommodation suitable for extended stays on the West Coast if outdoor/adventure tour guiding students were to undertake training there. A permanent, well-placed facility that provides high quality training with a range of accommodation for different market segments at reasonable cost will encourage students to travel to the West Coast to gain accredited qualifications.

It is important to note that a physical site alone will not deliver expected benefits. The appointment of a dynamic and well-qualified leader, and the development of strong relationships, effective partnerships and sound governance will be crucial to the success of WCWC.

- ▶ *Opportunity to investigate connections between outdoor education and West Coast Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage.*

The West Coast Aboriginal people interviewed for this project welcomed the opportunities WCWC would offer to share their history and culture. The research revealed more than 35,000 years of Aboriginal presence on the West Coast and their local knowledge and insights about 'wilderness' can provide a fresh perspective to students and visitors alike. This knowledge is integral to the outdoor experience.



3-PHASE ROADMAP

Three phases:

- ▶ Prospectus and engagement
- ▶ West Coast Wilderness Centre – the first two years
- ▶ A permanent West Coast Wilderness Centre

PHASE 1 – PROSPECTUS AND ENGAGEMENT		
ACTION	WHO	COMMENTS
1. Create small Leadership Group	Steering Group & WCC	Group to include adventure practitioners, Council, arts, industry & business sectors
2. Develop Prospectus for WCWC	Leadership Group	Prospectus to clearly define project & gain support
3. Engage key stakeholders – Premier's Visitor Economy Advisory Council, T21 Steering Committee, Ministerial Tourism and Hospitality Workforce Advisory Committee, Department of State Growth	Leadership Group	Engagement to help reveal the most appropriate state government agency to partner with
PHASE 2 – WCWC – COORDINATED SERVICES IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS		
ACTION	WHO	COMMENTS
1. Gain support for two years of operational funding	Leadership Group	Could be partnership with State Government agency
2. Appoint Director	Leadership Group	Must have vision, adventure qualifications & relationship skills
3. Identify short-term premises	Leadership Group & Director	Shopfront or similar to provide visibility & community access
4. Draft five-year business plan	Leadership Group & Director	Business plan essential to business development & realising viability of Centre
5. Build relationships with business & community	Director	Community support is imperative to project success
6. Build relationships with schools & VET sector	Director	Essential for quick wins
7. Facilitate delivery of school group	Director	Meets short-term industry



experiences and VET accredited training		needs & realises school-based interest in Centre
PHASE 3 – WCWC – A PERMANENT CENTRE		
ACTION	WHO	COMMENTS
1. Secure funding for Centre	WCC	Engage Federal Government for capital funding with associated provision for some operational funding
2. Identify quality design process to realise Centre vision	TBC	Expression of Interest process?
3. Construct West Coast Wilderness Centre	TBC	



COST CONSIDERATIONS

PHASE 1 – PROSPECTUS AND ENGAGEMENT	
ACTION	CONSIDERATIONS
1. Prospectus	Writing, design & printing <i>State Government funding?</i>
PHASE 2 – COORDINATED SERVICES	
2. Director	2-year salary plus on-costs 2-year accommodation Vehicle? Phone? Internet? Etc? <i>Joint State & Federal Government funding?</i>
3. Office accommodation & learning space	2-year lease on suitable premises to support administration, client meetings & training Allowance for administration & community & stakeholder engagement
4. Transport	Bus & trailer for transporting students & equipment to adventure sites Hire existing services on needs basis? Lease or buy?
5. Equipment	Adventure related equipment including kayaks, ropes, safety equipment etc
PHASE 3 – WEST COAST WILDERNESS CENTRE	
6. Design, construction & project management of Centre	Multi-million dollar investment in bricks & mortar Centre <i>Federal Government funding?</i>
7. Operational costs	On-going operational costs including salaries, maintenance, cleaning, administration, phones & computers etc



CONCLUSION

The Discussion Paper posed the question:

Is a West Coast Wilderness immersive learning experience an opportunity whose time has come?

The evidence suggests that establishing a West Coast Wilderness Centre specialising in immersive wilderness education and training is realisable if time and effort are invested in recruiting outstanding leadership, developing a bespoke model connected to community and catering to a diversity of groups, shaping appropriate governance, and selecting an extraordinary wilderness site. It will need a long-term commitment to come to fruition.

A small leadership group is proposed to initially develop a Prospectus and engage key stakeholders. This 'ginger group' will need to drive the idea and prove to be resilient in adversity. It is a group which will need to encourage other people to follow a new, more interesting, or more active way of doing things, and to establish an enduring partnership with Government to realise the vision.

This Leadership Group is also responsible for appointing a Director with the right qualifications, attributes and commitment to the project, to be resident on the West Coast. This position is crucial to the success of the project – without a dynamic leader with the ability to form productive relationships, the project, no matter how good, runs the risk of falling over. It is essential the design of any built facility understands the needs of a diversity of users, including local communities, and the key qualities of excellence in outdoor/adventure training provision.

Taking time to plan and execute the promise of this project will be time well spent.

The wilderness is a West Coast strength and a wilderness centre like the suggested model can fulfil the requirements of the Project Brief and deliver real benefits to the West Coast. It will expand the horizons of local students, adult learners and businesses, and enable the West Coast to be a learning community that retains more young people through education provision, and employment and training opportunities.