

# Mt. CRIPPS KARST, TASMANIA

## - Another Mt. Etna?

- Arthur Clarke

The Mount Cripps karst in North West Tasmania is in the immediate firing line for a limestone mining operation by a Western Australian company which plans to quarry millions of tonnes of limestone, ostensibly to supply the nearby silver/lead/zinc and copper/gold mining operation of the Hellyer Mine (which supposedly only has a shelf life of ten years). However, once established such a limestone quarrying operation would be a likely supply source for many other Tasmanian outlets and other nearby mining sites.

On Saturday 12 February 2000, on page 43 of a local regionally-distributed NW Tasmania newspaper, "The Advocate", there was an advertisement placed by the *Tasmanian Registrar of Mines* stating that: "Notice is hereby given that the Director of Mines intends to recommend to the Minister for Infrastructure, Energy and Resources that he grant an exploration license for an area of 29 square kilometres at Mount Cripps to Western Metal Resources Ltd., of P. O. Box 761, West Perth, WA, 6872. Principal commodity sought: LIMESTONE..."

The accompanying area map with the application notice in "The Advocate" newspaper shows the proposed license area as an extensive north-easterly to south-westerly trending area which extends from the Cradle Mountain link Road down to western shores of Lake Macintosh and adjoining the eastern boundary of the Hellyer Mine. The application area covers most of the known limestone and caves shown in the map accompanying the recent article by Dave Heap, which appeared in ACKMA Journal #37 (December 1999) - page 5.

In Dave Heap's article, entitled "Human impact on the Mount Cripps karst", he outlines the caving activity and systematic karst exploration by members of the Savage River Caving Club (SRCC) in the area - which lies 20km north west of the scenic Cradle Mountain. Although still under lease to a private forestry company (North Forests), access to the area is regulated by the SRCC who have gated the access road and established their own small shelter site. Over 200 caves have been recorded by SRCC and most of these lie within the 29 square kilometre area proposed for inclusion in this mining company's mineral exploration license.

The Mt. Cripps karst is one of the very few glaciated karst areas of Tasmania with pristine unlogged tall forest wilderness values, including a magnificent myrtle forest stand with shallow peat soils above the glacial alluvial cover. It has been recognised as a significant geoheritage site with outstanding karst features, being one of only 3-4 karst areas in Tasmania with the rare polygonal karst drainage structures, though comparatively little is known of its subterranean hydrology. In addition to its relatively unique geodiversity and geoheritage features, the karst area has significant biodiversity features including rare surface plants and quite unique invertebrate cave fauna communities,

including many new as yet unidentified cave dwelling species.

Prior to the Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process, most of the karst lay within an unallocated Crown Land area under the jurisdiction of *Forestry Tasmania* and given vague tenure as a RAP (a Recommended Area for Protection). Since the Tasmanian RFA, most of the Mt. Cripps karst has been given "tenure" as an unreserved ("Reynolds Falls") Nature Recreation Area, simply defined under the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Act (1970) as - "an area of land predominantly in a natural state". The stated purpose for a Nature Recreation Area, under this Tasmanian Government legislation, is for "the protection and maintenance of the natural and cultural values of the area of land and sustainable use of the natural resources of that area of land".

Following the RFA, all unreserved lands in Tasmania have been "opened up" for mineral exploration and/or mining, subject to the recommendations of the Resource and Planning Development Commission (RPDC). However, despite the fact that most of the karst area has been nominated for entry on the Register of the National Estate and all of the karst has been recommended for addition to the World Heritage Area, the RPDC has not yet publicly released its recommendations for this area. Unfortunately, in view of the recent application for an exploration licence by Western Metals, it now appears likely that the RPDC will ignore the significance of the geoconservation and biodiversity values and recommend that mineral exploration and/or mining be permitted in this Mt. Cripps karst area.

In the past, there has been an unfortunate tendency in Tasmania (and some other areas) that once an exploration license is granted, it has been perceived as explicit that mining will be permitted and that a mining license automatically follows on from an exploration license.

I urge all ACKMA members to send urgent letters of objection to:

- Jim Bacon: Premier of Tasmania, Parliament House, Hobart, Tasmania 7000, Australia (Email: [premier@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:premier@dpac.tas.gov.au));
- Paul Lennon: Deputy Premier and Tasmanian (Labor) Minister for Mines & Energy, Parliament House, Hobart, Tasmania, 7000 AUSTRALIA (Email: [deputy.premier@dier.tas.gov.au](mailto:deputy.premier@dier.tas.gov.au));
- Rene Hidding: Tasmanian (Liberal) Shadow Minister for Mines & Energy, Parliament House, etc. (Email: [rene.hidding@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:rene.hidding@parliament.tas.gov.au));
- Peg Putt: Tasmanian Leader of the "Greens", Parliament House, Hobart etc. (Email: [peg.putt@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:peg.putt@parliament.tas.gov.au)).

