

Franklin power

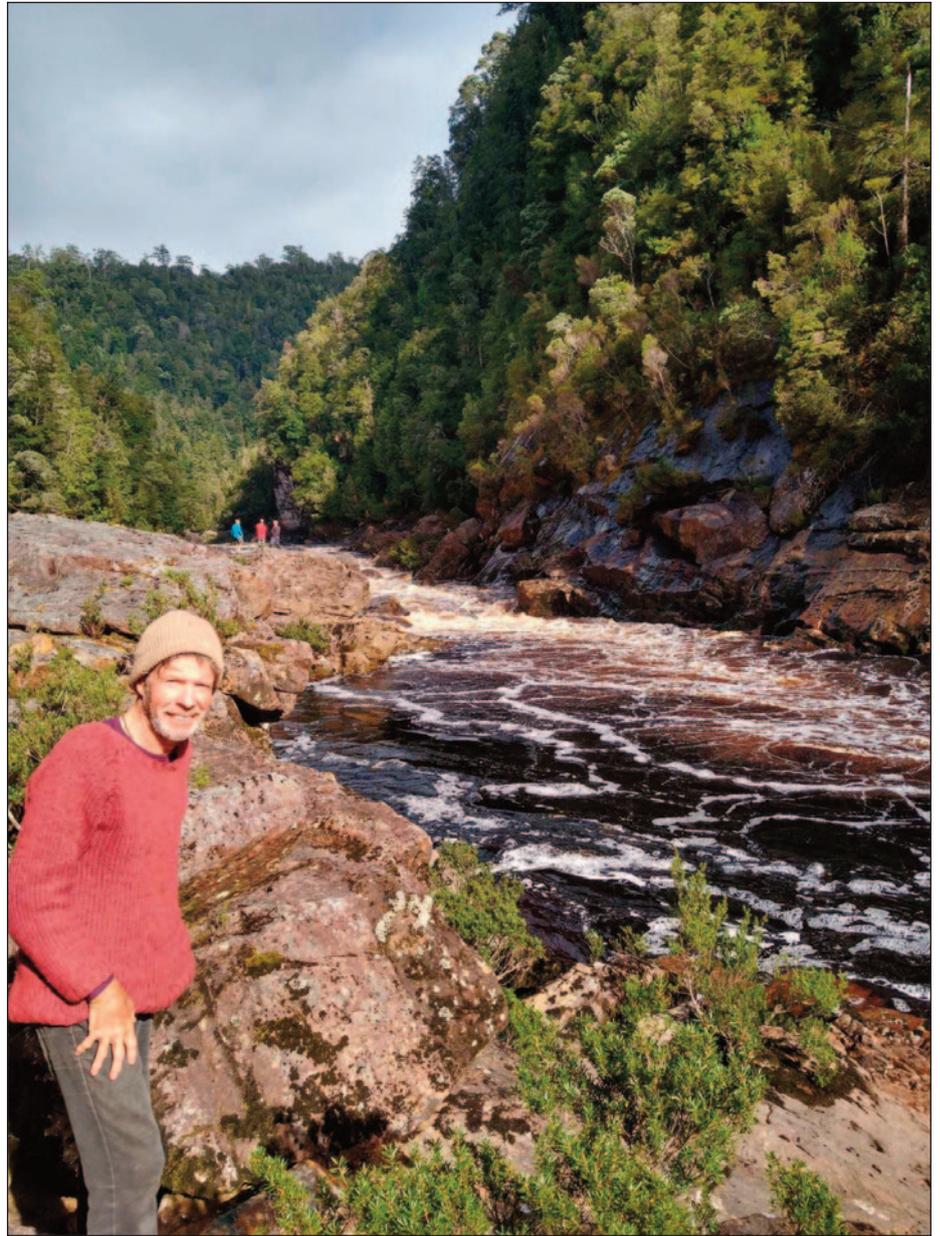
BY DAVID BISHOP

“GET LEFT” he called. “Get left!” Then there was cold, wet blackness as I came up under the upturned raft, hurtling down the rapids of Newlands Cascades on Tasmania’s Franklin River, feet first as the safety video had demonstrated, in survival mode, out from under the raft into the bright afternoon sunshine of day eight in this magnificent, awe inspiring wilderness.

I had always rejected the craziness of white water rafting until my beautiful nephew, Andrew, whom I had watched grow from a baby to a man, insisted, in his gentle and compelling way, allowing me no option but to agree to what I regarded as ten days of cold, wet misery. No credibility to say no, mainly because I was unable to claim age or infirmity to escape because I have been claiming, for many years, to be the magical age of 27, the age at which so many significant people died at the zenith of their powers: James Dean; Jim Morrison; Janis Joplin; Jimi Hendrix; Kurt Cobain - the list goes on.

Inevitably, on day one, I found myself on the banks of the Collingwood River, helping to pump up two rafts and a kayak along with nine adventurers, all of whom, consciously or not, regarded themselves as 27, save, perhaps, one of the guides, who was probably pretty close to that hallowed age.

The National Parks sign on the Collingwood River noticeboard warned, unequivocally, that this was



not the place to learn about white water rafting. I looked around silently at my companions. Most of them, I knew, had significant experience of such madness. For one of them, this was to be his fifth trip down the Franklin. All of them were surfers, kayakers, skiers and bush walkers.

When my son, Carlo, heard I was going he said “Get them to give you two life jackets ‘cause you’re a shit swimmer. “.

Farming superfine wool sheep in the Southern Tablelands was hardly the ideal preparation for this adventure.

But the Franklin is a main ar-

tery of Tasmania’s World Heritage Wilderness. It has, as the World Heritage citation states, such outstanding universal values, unique throughout the world, that it must be protected and conserved for all people, for all time.

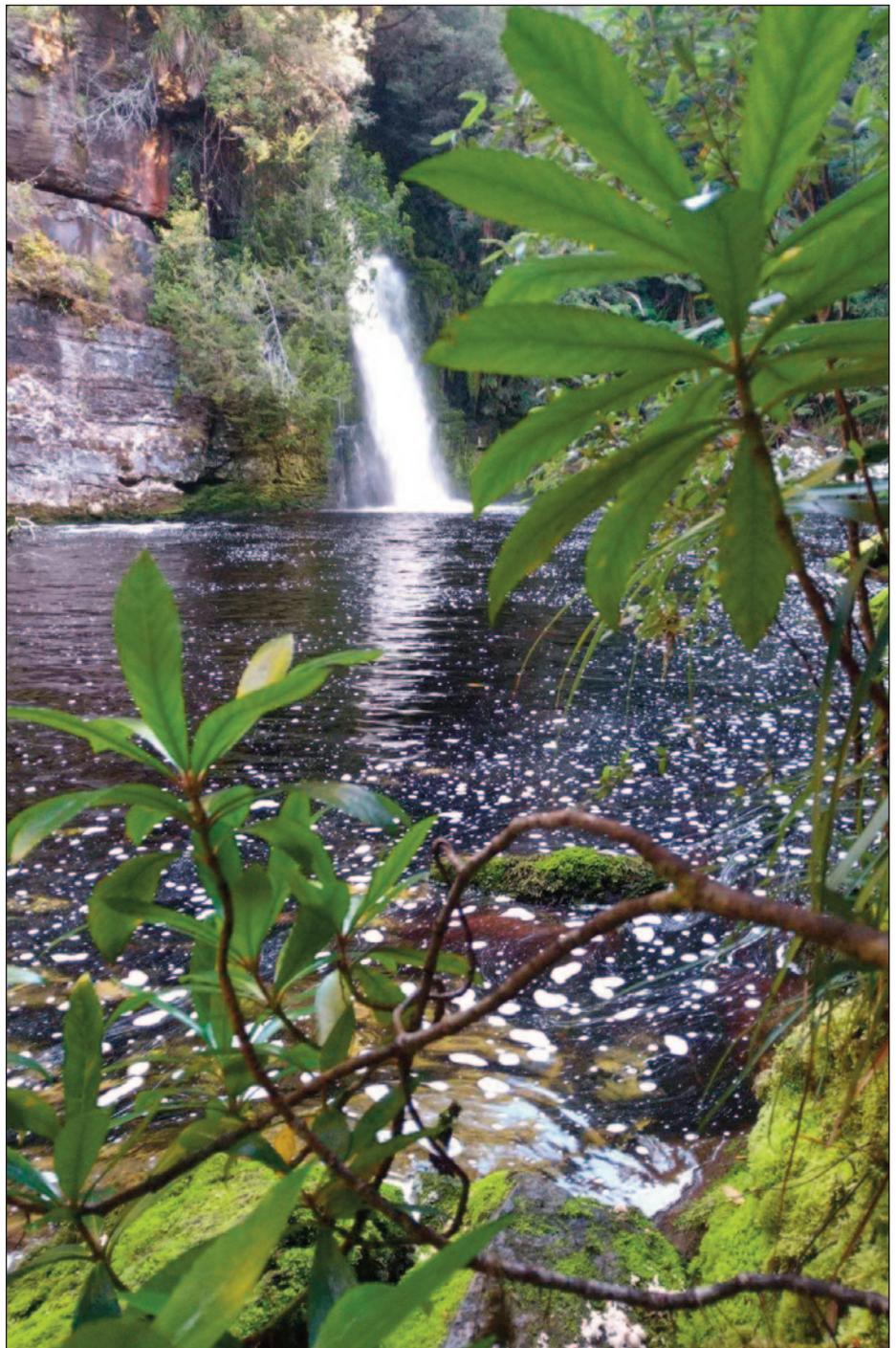
That is why the Australian people rose up, in response to a huge and carefully crafted campaign, to elect, in 1983, a national government who used their constitutional power to nominate that fabled wilderness for World Heritage listing as a cultural landscape, recognising both its natural values and its place, over tens of thousands of years, in the lives and culture of our First Nations people.

That single action has allowed us, and countless other adventurers, to enhance our life experience so profoundly in this wonder filled wilderness.

We have all been uplifted in our lives by the mystery, majesty and sheer power of the river, the vast beauty and intricacy of the forests and the awe inspiring, ever changing landscape. Such a landscape - capable, after a couple of rainy days: of raising the river by almost two metres; turning its pristine waters the colour of black coffee; creating huge and magnificent waterfalls in every gully on almost every river bend; elevating each rapid to Adrenalin pumping white water wonders; landing us in quiet, deep pools where the water flowed slowly like melted chocolate; and the froth and debris, given up by the saps of the forests, floated silently in intricate and ever changing patterns only to disappear over the velvet brink into the raging energy of the next life challenge.

There's a mystical quality to that wilderness, pervading all of its various manifestations, none more powerful than just two examples. Firstly, Rock Island, was made famous through a photograph by Peter Dombrovskis that the Tasmanian Wilderness Society placed as a full page advertisement in all major Australian newspapers, galvanising a huge cohort of Australians in voting against proposed dams.

The other, which needed no media stunts, is the Kuta Kina cave nestled in the forest at the edge of the lower Franklin, a place for quiet reflection, wonder and amazement; a place inhabited by First Nations people for around six thousand years, beginning twenty thousand years ago.



And for me and, I imagine, for all those who traverse that wilderness and those who put their lives in the Franklin's hands, there's an imponderable power that, deep down, envelops and changes us and all.

I've thought long about it and I still don't know how I emerged from the river that sunny day at the Newlands Cascades to find myself standing in the back of our other raft.

Franklin power?

