



Valerie & Sam Hach enjoy the view after walking up the Ice House track on Mt. Wellington.
Picture: LUKE BOWDEN

Talking Point: Breaking the spirit of kunanyi

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I WAS the man on the mountain, standing on a rocky outcrop as the snows of a blizzard swirled around me.

Seduced as I often am by the mountain's beauty, I had driven to The Springs for a walk to Sphinx Rock. The sun shone hard on the Organ Pipes when I set out and, as so often happens, the weather changed in the 20-minute drive from Hobart.

First cloud, then freezing rain and within minutes a raging blizzard. By this time I had reached Sphinx Rock, without a rain or snow-proof coat, but I wasn't complaining.

I stood there, not too close to the precipice because the wind was at my back, and watched the snow roll in waves before me, blotting out the distant city and casting the nearer eucalypts in dark outlines. The dead ones, killed in the bushfires of 1967, stood stark and tall, sinister stickmen.

I was the man on the mountain for an hour or so, defying the snow, as I so often defy mist and rain. If I see cloud on the pinnacle, foaming down the sides of the peak like a poorly poured Cascade pale ale flows down the side of a glass, I go anyway, take my chances.

I love this place and found myself drawn to it on virtually a daily basis, after I retired as a sub-editor on the Mercury a few years back. I was drawn to it, too, before I retired, but I then had to resist the urge to drop everything and go and explore its gullies and trails. Job and mortgage came first.



Rocks jut out from beneath a layer of snow near the summit of Mount Wellington. Picture: LUKE BOWDEN

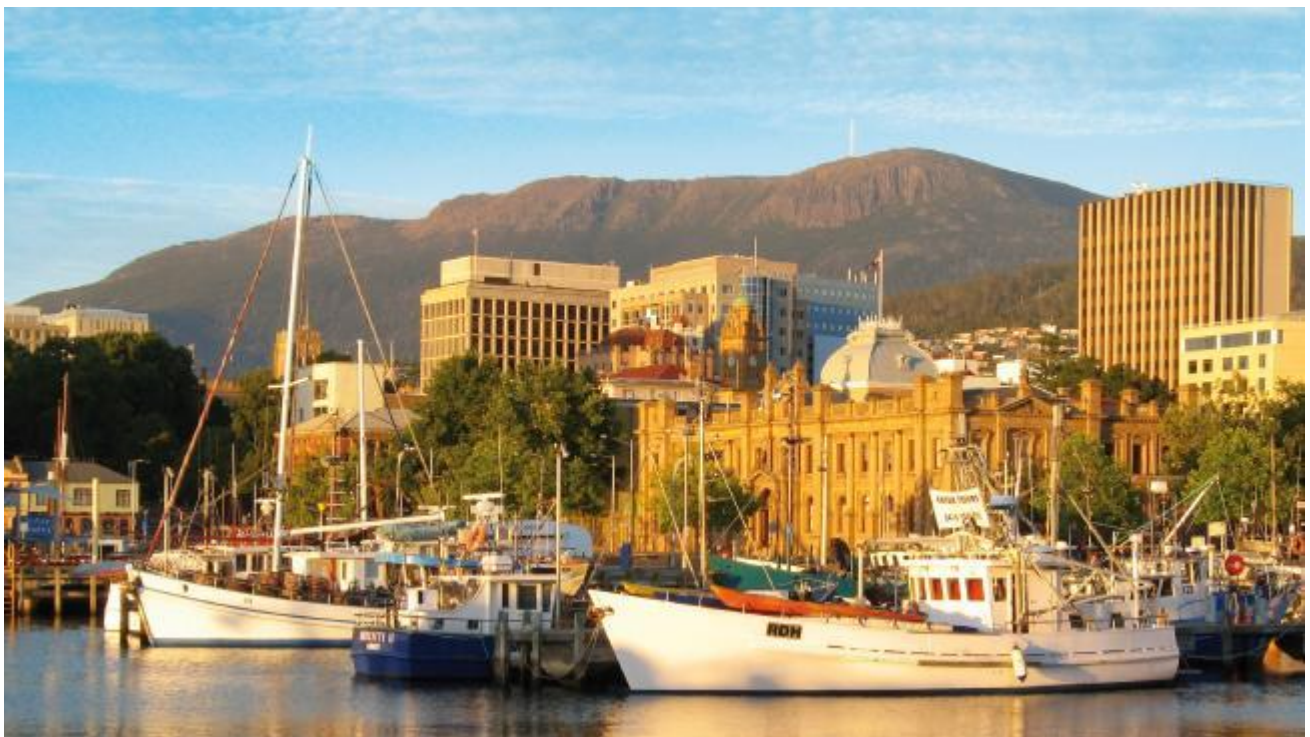
I was the man on the mountain, in a blizzard that painted out the city below. To my left the mountain resting atop the Organ Pipes was traced in a charcoal outline. The cold drove me to my car, and drove me home, but in my warm study the mountain loomed again. When I logged into my computer I found I had been sent a poster from a group trying to protect the mountain from development. And there was a picture of me, or a mountain man who resembled me, standing atop a rocky outcrop, looking to the far horizon. Only the season was different, the sky coloured in soothing pastel shades – yellow, ochre and purple – of a summer evening after the sun has set. The picture, in the travel poster style of the 1930s, announced a campaign to reaffirm the natural values of kunanyi/Mt Wellington, called Respect the Mountain in the face of the campaign to build a cable car to its peak.

I love the mountain, it's become a friend and I have tried to give it a name of my own. I call it Shy Mountain, because it so often hides its beauty under a cloak of cloud. So obsessed did I become with the mountain that I recorded its moods, and the way it shaped Hobart's modern history, over the course of a year, from midwinter 2012 with the aim of possibly writing a book about it. The book project is still on the go.

Development, especially of a cable car, would create a bridge in more than a metaphorical sense between mountain and city and they would somehow become one. The notion of wildness would be lost.

The year I chose proved to be a momentous one, because in those 12 months the power of veto exercised by the Wellington Park Management Trust was lifted. The decision cleared the way for development right to the mountain's summit, including, possibly, the construction of a cable car. Unlike the majority of cities across the globe, Hobart comprises two worlds, those of man and those of nature.

We cannot turn our heads without seeing the mountain standing over us, and our eyes are drawn to it irresistibly. It not only tells us there is a wild, untamed world out there beyond the safety and security of the city, our cocoon of glass, brick and concrete, but the peak is also used to determine what the weather will be on any given day. Cloud and mist signal rain, snow signals that Hobart's citizens will need an extra jumper, or to put on a winter coat when they venture out, even at the start of summer.



Mt. Wellington stands apart from the city, but at the same time is linked to it. Picture: Tourism Tasmania

“Because it’s there” were the famous words spoken by legendary mountaineer George Mallory in 1924 when he was asked why he wanted to climb Mt Everest, and I often think of them when I sit on Sphinx Rock and look down on the busy city.

The words have a resonance today in a slightly different context: “Why don’t we leave Mt Wellington as it is, simply because it’s there largely in its natural state.”

The mountain in the raw provides a contrast to the city, and this is one of the qualities that makes Hobart so different from other cities. And wild and untamed Tasmania is the main reason tourists are lured to the island in the first place.

Strangely, Mt Wellington stands apart from the city, but at the same time is linked to it, is part of its vital fabric.

Development, especially of a cable car, would create a bridge in more than a metaphorical sense between mountain and city and they would somehow become one.

The notion of wildness would be lost. A cable car and possibly other developments like a five-star hotel at the summit would tame the mountain and take away its wildness. The existing radio tower is enough to remind us of the hand of man, and the hand of “progress”.

Former Mercury sub-editor Donald Knowler has worked as a journalist in Britain, the US and interstate. He writes the On the Wing bird watching column for *TasWeekend* magazine in the *Saturday Mercury*. Between Cascade pale ales, he is writing a book about Mt. Wellington.