

NATIONAL TRUST ENDANGERED PLACES 2003



The French Garden and Observatory, D'Encastereaux Point, Recherche Bay

Location: The French Garden and Observatory, D'Encastereaux Point, Recherche Bay

Threat: Damage

Nominated by: National Trust of Australia (Tasmania)

Significance of Place

These recently discovered sites of the only identified relics of the French exploration of Tasmania, prior to European settlement, are of national significance to Australia and France. They provide evidence of the enormous scientific interest these hitherto uncharted lands held for Europeans in the late 18th century.

The D'Encastereaux expedition was the largest and best-equipped scientific expedition dispatched from France in the 18th century. Although its original purpose was to search for the missing explorer La Perouse, the expedition was fitted out with scientific instruments, and was accompanied by a selection of the finest available scientists.

Two landfalls were made on the Tasmanian coast at Recherche Bay - in April 1792 for 26 days, and again in January 1793 for 24 days. On both occasions the ships were seeking refuge and a replenishment of supplies, but on each occasion as much time as possible was devoted to scientific endeavour.

The botanists Labillardiere, Riche and Ventenat collected, catalogued and preserved hundreds of specimens of flora and fauna hitherto unknown in Europe, including the Tasmanian Blue Gum (later the Tasmanian state emblem). The hydrographers

charted previously unknown areas of the coast, and the astronomer Rossel discovered geo-magnetism of great significance to navigational science.

A garden and an observatory were established, and friendly contact made with local aboriginal people during the second stay. The first burial of a European in Tasmania occurred during this 2nd landfall. The detailed expedition diaries record all these activities, and have been able to used with remarkable accuracy to indicate the location and appearance of the structures they established.

Description of Threat

The sites are located in forest which is slated for destruction. Although the immediate sites themselves may not be destroyed, present logging proposals seem to propose leaving only remnants of forest around the designated sites. This would destroy the remarkably intact and undisturbed nature of this area which presents almost identically from the water as it did to the French scientists 200 years ago.

Furthermore, an access road is required, which would be followed by some housing, further intruding on this pristine site.

See: www.lophoto.com/recherchebay/indx.html

continued



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Action Required

This is a unique site, and merits the highest level of protection. The whole peninsula should be protected by Tasmanian Heritage Council listing, and a heritage agreement under the Historic Cultural Heritage Act should be negotiated, taking into account Tasmanian, Australian and French government interests. This site should be nominated to the proposed National Heritage List as soon as it is established.

Governments should commit to negotiation with the owners of this site to ensure that the whole peninsula is fully protected and that adequate compensation arrangements are agreed.

Possible future proposals could include a joint Australian/French government memorial to these French scientists, similar to the cooperative agreement between the Australian and Turkish governments concerning Anzac Cove.

For further details contact Des Hanlon National Trust of Australia (Tasmania)
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