

GO AUSTRALIA CAMPING & 4WD ADVENTURES

Wes Moule

altruist | adventurer | ambassador | survivor

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Wes Moule is a man with a remarkable story to tell – if you can track him down! While for most of us a work-time commute ends at the office, Wes reports to the iconic Tasmanian wilderness. His job is to deliver food and supplies to expedition groups in some of the most remote locations on the Apple Isle.

What makes Wes Moule's story even more extraordinary is that in 2005, he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma and now raises money for Launceston's Holman Clinic where he has received treatment since. After going into remission in 2010, it's now his mission to repay the great work of the clinic by donating one dollar for each kilometre he walks to help others receive treatment.

Having simultaneously turned his passion for the rugged Tasmanian landscape into not only a full-time occupation but also an admirable and selfless pursuit to assist others, Wes endures everything from horizontal hail to gentle ribbing from his mates at

occasionally being compared to Bear Grylls. Neither of the aforementioned are enough for him to consider retirement however, and there are no plans for a desk job any time soon.

'This is me and what I do. In no way do I mean for this to sound reckless and I would never deliberately put myself in any danger, but this job is all I want to do and if it's my time to go, I can think of no better place for it to happen,' he says. It's a typically assured and confident response from a man who tackles some of the harshest conditions our country has to offer.

Tiger snakes, tumid rivers and blizzards are all inherent dangers associated with such an occupation, so far removed from the urban zeitgeist that some may question how this man manages to motivate himself to keep going.

'I derive energy from my surroundings and feed off an adrenalin that comes from the connection I feel towards the country,' he insists. A bit of music helps too it seems. 'Anything that gets me going a bit. Thunderstruck by AC/DC is a favourite. I like a bit of Kings of Leon and John Butler too.'

Such a close bond with the land surely helps when dealing with the unpredictably hostile weather the Tasmanian highlands has the potential to unleash. 'Minus thirty degrees Celsius with wind-chill will mean your gloves freeze and the straps of your back pack are frozen straight,' he explains.

Wes reckons he could write a book when it comes to the amount of people he has helped out of trouble along the way. Often they are those who have underestimated the erratic climate of the Tasmanian wilderness. If he himself should encounter the perils of a snake bite or some other similar hazard such as a broken leg, he has an emergency plan in place.



'I guess my training comes into play. Obviously a satellite phone is a must. I can call the air ambulance or search and rescue, wear a high visibility vest and perform as much first aid as possible until help arrives.'

For all the potential misadventure, Wes' office holds an attraction beyond the reasoning of most that may not be adventurous enough to experience what he sees. Even at night, vast snow blankets reflecting a majestic full moon glow or nocturnal animals playing beneath the stars are enough to make his chosen occupation one he wishes to continue indefinitely.

Growing up in South Australia and working as a diesel mechanic for twenty-two years, Wes began visiting Tasmania regularly for bushwalking trips. Eventually his love for the area meant packing up and moving to Tasmania permanently, settling in Sheffield, the small 'town of murals' about thirty kilometres from the port city of Devonport in the state's north-west.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the proposal of the Gordon-below-Franklin Dam project, and subsequent protests, which led to the cancellation of the scheme, became a federal government issue thanks to help from an image by renowned Tasmanian wilderness photographer Peter Drombrovskis. *Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend* portrayed a visually stunning section of the Franklin River that many political commentators believe helped Bob Hawke in his 1983 endeavour for success at the Australian polls. Similarly, the photograph had a positive impact on seventeen-year-old Wes Moule. 'I was blown away that we actually had country like that in Australia and had to come and see it for myself. Eventually, I just decided to stay and live here.'

This truly one-of-a-kind man is alone in that there are not too many others employed on a full-time basis in his line of work, and he admits that not a lot of potential food-droppers are quite prepared for such a labour-intensive occupation. 'Basically, it's such a physically demanding job that nobody else wanted to do it,' he says.

He works as a subcontractor for Tasmanian Expeditions that offer an interpretive guided experience for the more adventurous holiday goers and school groups that want the opportunity to see the Tasmanian wilderness. The job involves delivering packs of up to 45 kg to remote locations and then making the way back to civilisation, only to turn around and do it all again, trekking somewhere between 2000 and 3000 km each season. He also spends time guiding and explains how he loves each equally. 'I enjoy both. It's completely different. If I'm out by myself then I've got a job to do and that's all I'm thinking about. However, I do enjoy sharing my knowledge and experience with others. I love to see their [people's] reactions to the Tasmanian wilderness for the first time.'

In addition to his work raising money for the Holman Clinic, Wes is an ambassador for Appin Hall Children's Foundation; a respite and healing centre that assists in the recovery of children that have experienced illness and trauma. He acknowledges the generous support of his employers, Tasmanian Expeditions, and also the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service that allow him the opportunity to conduct a once-a-year guided 'Hearts of the Wilderness' expedition. Proceeds from the trip go towards helping the children involved with Appin Hall. Wes has also received support from Macpac (outdoor clothing and equipment suppliers) that have, during the past few years, played a large part in his extraordinary story by making him special clothing, having him as one of their pack testers, supporting his charities, and assisting him as he underwent chemotherapy in 2010.

When he isn't out on the track, Wes spends time at home relaxing. He says eating well and taking that well-deserved breather is integral to maintaining his lifestyle. 'I make a real effort to look after my body and have been lucky enough to remain relatively sickness-free, cancer aside of course,' he jokes in his archetypal, understated way.

It is interesting to note however, that whilst Wes Moule obviously values a healthy lifestyle and the time to recharge it is not always easy to adapt to the real world, particularly after a long expedition.

'Cars, fences, sheds, roads, power lines and cities are ugly compared with being out in Tasmania's wilderness,' he says. 'If I was pushed for something that I don't enjoy about my job, I'd have to say that after I've been out of civilisation for an extended period, I do have a little trouble adjusting to the cars, beeps and signs of Hobart.'

Wes Moule is many things to many people; tenacious food-dropper, enthusiastic nature guide, altruistic benefactor, or even Tasmania's answer to Bear Grylls! But, for at least one person, he temporarily became a guardian angel.

After spending an afternoon taking some amazing pictures, photographer Jeff Crowe became lost on the plateau at the base of Cradle Mountain. With a full moon rising over an icy landscape, he fell to his knees in the snow and let out a yell for help. 'Are you right mate?' he heard a voice reply. Marvelling at the response coming from the darkness, Jeff learned that the simple words of succour belonged to Wes, who just so happened to be spending some of his downtime enjoying a spot of moonlight skiing – as you do ...



With an energy and lust for life in the face of the adversity of illness that would keep a lesser man at home, Wes' achievements should act as an inspirational antidote against laziness and apathy for many of us. Pack-hauling supplies through the Tasmanian wilderness he admits that it's fitting his name sounds similar to an animal whose moniker has become synonymous with such activity. Ask Wes if there is something that could possibly help him along the way to make his job just that little bit easier and he replies, 'An actual mule'.

To find out more:

Wes Moule and the Holman Clinic:

www.wesmoule.com

Appin Hall Children's Foundation:

www.appinhall.com

Cradle Mountain information:

www.parks.tas.gov.au

and search 'cradle mountain'

Jeff Crowe's story:

www.australiantraveller.com/cradle-mountain/007-cradle-mountain-tas/