

a mountain of a man

an inspiration to the world

Photos Adam Holbrook www.tasadam.com

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Wes Moule

Wes Moule is a man with a remarkable story to tell if you can track him down. Whilst 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 his story even more extraordinary is that in 2005, Wes was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma and now raises money for Launceston's Holman Clinic where he has received treatment since. After going in to remission in 2010, Wes made it his mission to repay the great work of the clinic by donating \$1 for each kilometre he walks to help others receive treatment.



a mountain and a man



Having simultaneously turned his passion for the rugged Tasmanian landscape not only in to 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 Wes 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. “-30 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, Wes has an emergency plan in place.

“I guess my training comes in to 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 bush-walking trips. Eventually his love for the area meant that he decided to pack up and move to Tasmania permanently, settling in Sheffield, the small “town of murals” about 30kms 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 issue thanks to help from an image by renowned Tasmanian wilder-

ness photographer Peter Drombrowskis. *Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend* portrayed a visually stunning section of the Franklin River which many political commentators believe helped Bob Hawke in his 1983 endeavor for success at the Australian federal election. Similarly, the photograph had a positive impact on Wes’ life as a 17 year-old. “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.”

Truly one of a kind, Wes is alone in that there are not too many others employed on a full-time basis in his line of work, and 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.

Wes works as a subcontractor for Tasmanian Expeditions, who offer the more adventurous holiday goers and school groups the opportunity to see the Tasmanian wilderness as an interpretive guided experience. His job involves delivering packs of up to 45kg to remote locations and then making his way back to civilisation, only to turn around and do it all again, trekking somewhere between 2000 and 3000km 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 reactions at seeing 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 which assists in the recovery of children who have experienced illness and trauma. He acknowledges the generous support of his employers, Tasmanian Expeditions, and also the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife in allowing him the opportunity to conduct a once a year guided expedition “Hearts of the Wilderness”. Proceeds from the trip go towards helping the children involved with Appin Hall. Wes has also received support from Macpac who have over the past few years played a large part in his extraordinary story from making him special clothing, to having him as one of their pack testers, supporting his charities and assisting Wes himself 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 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 of time, 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 of the area, Jeff Crowe became lost on the plateau at the base of Cradle Mountain. With a full moon rising over an icy landscape, the photographer fell to his knees in the snow and let out a yell for help. “Are you right, mate?” he heard a voice reply. Marveled by the response that came from the darkness, Jeff learnt that the simple words of succor belonged to Wes, who just so happened to be spending some of his downtime out 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 is 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”.

www.wesmoule.com

Words the lost dream to hear
"Are you right, mate?"



Alone - at night in the snow – and hopelessly lost!

Jeff Crowe's touching story

and his fortunate meeting with Wes



Jeff V Crowe

Jeff tells his story . . .

It was a beautiful winter's day. After getting some shots at the base of Cradle Mountain, I headed back, but after walking for half an hour I decided it wasn't the right way. I backtracked and looked up to see a full moon rising. I quickly set up my tripod to capture this amazing sight.

I was thinking how fortunate I was that I had taken the wrong track... and then the guide markers disappeared

under snow and I became hopelessly lost. I'd started the walk to Marions Lookout at 1pm; it was now 9pm and I was bugged. I sank to my knees and yelled, 'Help!'

To my amazement, a male voice replied, 'Are you right, mate?' He told me to walk towards his torch. He introduced himself as Wes Moule and he was going moonlight skiing. He insisted he guide me back over the next 200m as it was very icy. He said he carried 45kg packs to the walkers doing the Overland Track in summer.

I googled Wes later (www.wesmoule.com) and found he was in remission from cancer, and had vowed that for every kilometre walked carrying the packs he would donate \$1 to the W. P. Holman Clinic in Launceston. Wes walked 1220km in 2010-11, and 1170km in 2011-12.

I finally made it back to the car park at 10.30pm. The car was frozen over and the road was iced up but I made it home. Then came the hard part: explaining why I was late to my wife!