

Book review — *Winter Light* by Grant Dixon

PENNY CAREY-WELLS

Self-published, 2020

Grant Dixon's beautiful new publication *Winter Light*, a welcome gift amongst my Xmas parcels, shows Tasmania in a fresh way. Dixon's love of mid-winter bushwalking, esteemed knowledge of Tasmanian wilderness areas and his keen eye for composition have delivered views of this island that most of us may never see for ourselves. In the depth of winter, when the majority of the population savours the comfort of their heated homes, Dixon heads out in search of the alpine splendour in Tasmania's high country.

Dixon's grand passion for this island state is evident on every one of the 120 stylishly formatted pages. He tells us that most of the images have been captured during the last twenty-five years of his remote winter trips. While his superb photographs dominate the narrative the accompanying text allows readers to travel to a deeper understanding of Dixon's own journey of discovery of the stunning vistas of Tasmania.

Channeling the grand landscapes of legendary photographer Ansel Adams, Grant Dixon captures the hidden beauty of wintery Tasmania well beyond the reach of tarmac, beyond gravel roads and beyond marked tracks. I can only imagine him leaving his car, lugging his bulky pack bristling with tent, lenses and tripod, as he sets off into deep snow. How does he navigate? His images show pristine alpine views devoid of rock cairns or snow-poles and other markers. The isolation appears extreme. We can only admire his forty years of experience in challenging conditions that would normally restrict other adventurers.

Early in the book, on page 18, Dixon reminds us of these adverse conditions. In a succinct paragraph of almost poetic text set opposite a photograph of rime-ice on the southern escarpment of Ben Lomond he records how he suffered 'freezing fingers [as he] fiddled with camera controls and positions.' Yet the sublime brilliance of his compositions almost belies their making.



» Wind-scoured snow, Du Cane Range. Image credit: © Grant Dixon



» Rime ice, Ben Lomond. Image credit: © Grant Dixon

Like watching seamless double back summersaults performed by a master gymnast we marvel at Dixon's snowy kingdoms almost without thought of the perilous conditions he endured to obtain them.

We travel through the pages of *Winter Light* as if on our own journey of discovery. Dixon has balanced our tour with grand panoramas such as 'Dawn light on Barn Bluff, from Cradle Mountain' p 15, and 'Dolerite columns at dawn, Eliza Plateau' p 107, with close views of the terrain he traverses. He captures the intrigue of patterned ice-bound tree trunks, and shimmering tiara-delicate 'Hoar frost crystals on grass, Walls of Jerusalem', p 109.

The final photo in the *Winter Light* shows Dixon standing beside his tiny bright orange tent. The two of them look so alone, marooned in deep snow; they provide the scale needed to fully appreciate the massive ice-covered lump of Frenchmans Cap that looms beyond them. I'm drawn to this image each time I open the book.

It thrills me to witness the absolute remoteness that Dixon commits to during his excursions. Coming upon it last in the book caused me to immediately go back to the beginning and reassess each photo for a second time imagining that bright little tent just outside the picture plane, waiting for Dixon to return to its safety.

Most Tasmanians hardly know snow. It's not our natural element. We may occasionally visit kunanyi cocooned in warm cars, stopping briefly to throw snowballs and squeal and shriek in the wintry whiteness. Or perhaps we're skiers who chase the thrill of the slopes and the visual beauty of pristine mountains so pure it makes hearts sing. However most skiers also enjoy a chalet nearby with mulled wine, good dinners and a warm bed. Yet skiers, especially Tasmanians, also appreciate how mountain winds can freeze the very marrow of your bones, and that sudden disorienting whiteouts can occur without warning. It's easy to get lost out there.

How blessed we are that Dixon has ventured forth, done the hard yards and taken us where most fear to tread. In doing so he has captured the winter view of



» Winter camp, Frenchmans Cap. Image credit: © Grant Dixon



» Ice on tarn, Hartz Mountains. Image credit: © Grant Dixon

our most precious wilderness, this superb Tasmania that dedicated wilderness warriors have spent their lives striving to protect.

Indeed many of the iconic images in *Winter Light* could become part of that weaponry. Just as Peter Dombrovskis' famed image, *Rock Island Bend*, swayed the worldview that saved the Franklin River, the sensational winter scenes Dixon has photographed have a similar power. Most importantly during this current campaign surrounding the exploitation of Lake Malbena, Dixon's images demonstrate a profound appreciation of silence.

Winter Light is a handsome book—it re-packages icy Tasmania under a mantle of snow and ice. Supported by Hobart's top design trio of Lynda Warner, Tracey Diggins and Simon Olding, Grant Dixon has produced a coffee table volume that should be valued in every Tasmanian home. At slightly larger than A4 landscape, the book is easily held so when the cold winds return we can curl up on the couch and enjoy Dixon's wild white landscapes just beyond our cities. Vistas so close, yet so far.

Dixon's last paragraph states: 'my images capture a fleeting instant ... being honest to the landscape and the sometimes hard-won moment in time that inspired me to capture it.' We are blessed that he has chosen to share these precious moments with us, and with the world.



» Frozen pool, Walls of Jerusalem. Image credit: © Grant Dixon

Winter Light has almost sold out, but at the time of writing is still available in some Tasmanian bookshops.



» Dawn light on Barn Bluff, from Cradle Mountain. Image credit: © Grant Dixon