



WILD THINGS

Mid-life Reflections

Four decades of *Wild* Magazine.

Forty years is a long time, whether for a human, a business, or a magazine. And when you consider how much has changed since 1981, it's amazing that *Wild* Magazine is still going. We've gone from A-frame tents to ultralight flies; steak and potatoes to freeze-dried risotto; first Australian ascents of Mount Everest to plans for fat-tyred bike expeditions across Antarctica. And throughout it all—the early days of planning and graft, the boom years in the 80s and 90s, the advent of the internet and the resulting digital disruption—*Wild* has been publishing at least quarterly, sending packets of inspiration out into the world.

I'm in my forties too. From this far along the track, I can see the importance of the long game, and have realised that a lot of what makes life good comes from patience, perseverance, kindness, and curiosity. This mid-life perspective is like going up in an airplane and seeing the curvature of the Earth: From here I can see the arcs on the circle of life. I can understand youth from both inside and out, and see old age not as an uninspiring foreign country—a compulsory stopover if you travel for long enough—but as a continuation and a culmination of the journey, with its own challenges, rewards and contentment.

There isn't a life cycle for a publication: Magazines can be launched and sunk in a year, splutter on for decades, burn bright and short. So instead of judging the success of a magazine against customary measures—readership, circulation, advertising—it's more telling to look at its influence.

The eager young things who picked up *Wild's* first issue would now be approaching sixty. During the intervening four decades, *Wild* has kindled

people's love of nature and outdoor recreation, opened doors into other, more adventurous lives, sparked trip ideas, and given people the necessary skills and knowledge—or at least an idea of where to begin. There would be tens of thousands of people whose passion has been piqued by this magazine; I've not only spoken to lots of them, I am one, as is current editor James McCormack.

Wild's success smoothed the way for other publishers, providing a model, an audience, and the encouragement needed for others to produce walking and climbing guidebooks, and books on

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nature and conservation and exploration and adventure. This magazine has played a key role in the careers of many Australian outdoor writers and photographers; it has published profiles on adventurers from mountaineer Andrew Lock to teenage climber Andrea Han, and on thinkers from Tim Flannery to Bob Brown. It has supported important conservation campaigns in every part of Australia, and set the agenda for discussions.

Wild was delivered to State Premiers' offices around Australia, informing politicians of what mattered to the outdoors community. Its stance hasn't always been popular—over the years the magazine has lost readers and advertisers for sticking to its values, for staying true to its ethos rather than taking the softer,

more pliable path. (Examples of putting values before popularity are numerous and diverse, from attitudes towards advertorials, to the magazine's support of conservation campaigns, to recent articles about lodge developments in national parks.) However, this constancy and advocacy has been valued by many more than have disapproved, earning the magazine great respect. One classic example was in 2006: At the party to celebrate the 100th issue of *Wild*, Bob Brown skipped dinner with the Queen to launch the magazine edition.

The positive impact of this magazine over the last forty years is impossible to measure, stretching from the local to the global, from tiny, personal wins—the selection of the right stove—to transforming people's lives by introducing them to lifelong passions. And throughout it all, *Wild* has continued to celebrate Australia's outdoor adventures, community, and wild places, while advocating for their protection.

Wild is important not just for the individual articles and images it prints, the campaigns it contains, the individual magazines published; it's also valuable for what they represent, add up to and become: a window to inspire, educate and give balance, to remind people what they've got, help them enjoy it and foster a community that cares. Showing us what we've got. Sharing with us our wild places, the adventures out there. Our explorers, scientists, and artists; the possibilities and perils.

There is so much to celebrate. And if there is ever an excuse for celebration, it should be grabbed: The last couple of years of disasters, cancellations and forced life recalibrations should have taught us that, at least.

Happy 40th, *Wild*.