

HELEN ACHURCH

AUSTRALIA, MACQUARIE ISLAND NATURE RESERVE

RANGERS: HOLDING THE THIN GREEN LINE. SERIES ONE

"Work hard & enjoy what you do, many people would love to step into your shoes but in reality very few of them actually could".

I am the Ranger In Charge, Macquarie Island Nature Reserve, Tasmania Parks & Wildlife Service. I have been here on & off for 3 years. Due to the islands remoteness, postings are 1 year's duration. The reserve has World Heritage Area status, is a Biosphere Reserve & listed on the Register of the National Estate. The island is bountiful with wildlife during the breeding seasons providing a home for numerous threatened & endemic species. The Australian Antarctic Division research station & meteorological office have been here since 1948. The island also has a rich although gruesome early history around the exploitation of seals & penguins for commercial oil enterprises.

I enjoy the challenges of living & working in a remote, unpredictable & sometimes hostile environment. I finally know what it is like never to get bored in a job.

There are 5 field huts spaced 10 km apart around the island. Depending on the weather & the wildlife breeding cycles, I will work at various sites with the only access by foot, sometimes taking 2.5 hours to get there & staying off base for a couple of weeks.

The most challenging part of this job is the elements. When conducting the rockhopper penguin census the days involve scrambling around rocky terrain following the edge of the colony, searching for penguin nests. The day inevitably involves falling into some form of bog. Around the penguin colonies, this is often comprised of knee deep mud mixed with penguin faeces and carcasses. Once you get out of this you tip the liquid out of your boots and continue scrambling. This can sometimes involve walking into a 40-50 knot breeze with driving hail or rain. The home trek is done in the dark with a head torch.

I aspire to ecosystem & species conservation; if they go so does our sense of wonder at the diversity of the world. I hope in 20 years protected area management is seen as a serious business, that it is recognised as critical to everyone's life. Unfortunately I think the thin green line will be a lot thinner.



"I originally applied for the Wildlife Ranger position as I come from a background of fauna survey. I wanted to experience the wild natural beauty of the island with all its wildlife and landscapes".



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