

# PROTECTED AREA PLAN FOR THE CENTRAL PEAKS

2007 - 2010



Per Löchen

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Co-ordinated by  
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## 1. Executive Summary

1.1. The Peaks Protected Area Plan (PAP) has been developed through a series of workshops facilitated by Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks followed by further discussions and meetings with individuals and smaller groups to agree actions. The process has been informed by surveys undertaken by specialists in invertebrates (Dr Philip and Mrs Myrtle Ashmole and Howard Mendel, supported by Ed Thorpe) and bryophytes (Mr Martin Wigginton) together with vegetation surveys and the establishment of a Peaks database (created by Alan Mills and Edsel Daniels) as a monitoring and management tool. The work has been funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) jointly managed by the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

1.2 The PAP represents a consensus of views of all St Helena and international participants. The intention is that this document will be used as a major input into annual planning cycles of the St Helena Government Departments as well as being supported by non-governmental organisations and private businesses.

1.3 The layout of the PAP is as follows:

- Section 3 describes why we need a plan, its purpose and policy and legal basis.
- Sections 4,5 and 6 provide background and supporting information
- Section 7, 8 and 9 are the outputs of the workshop, describing the analysis of threats, Vision for the Peaks, goal, aim and objective of the plan and their justification and the activities table which adds detail as to how the objectives will be met.
- Sections 10 and 11 describe what other supporting plans may be required for the Protected Area Plan and how it will be monitored and reviewed.

1.4 For the purpose of this plan the Central Peaks are the Central Ridge which forms a huge curve around Sandy Bay from Hoopers Rock (>700m) in the west, north-eastwards via the Depot (>670m), High Peak (798m) and Mount Vesey (>740m) on to Casons Gate (>690m) and east along the Sandy Bay Ridge to Stitch's Ridge and to the three Peaks – often referred to as the Peaks - of Mount Actaeon (800m), Diana's Peak, the highest point of the Island at 820m, and Cuckold's Point the southern most extension of the ridge.

1.5 The Central Ridge has much higher rainfall than elsewhere on the Island, and for much of the time is shrouded in mist. The endemic vegetation of the uplands has developed in a climate where high rainfall and mists have been a regular occurrence, annual rainfall is high c. 1,200mm (compared to 200mm in Jamestown) and can be 5 -10°C cooler than Jamestown. This supply of above ground water makes St Helena's cloud forest excellent habitat for many different plants and animals and it is in this area where fragments of the original cloud forest still survive.

1.6 The Central Peaks support a rich variety of endemic and indigenous plants and animals, many of which are found no-where else on the island and moreover no-where else on earth. They constitute a rich biological heritage that we have a national and international responsibility to conserve.

1.7 The habitats of the Peaks, as well as many of the species associated with them, are under threat. This is primarily due to the legacy of historical land management practices that resulted in large-scale habitat destruction and the introduction of alien invasive species (from the 16<sup>th</sup> through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century). However, the threat is compounded today because of the continued deterioration and loss of habitats and populations. This is due to:

- competition by alien invasive species

- the rarity of the flora and fauna (with small populations that are often isolated from one another)
- not enough people (including limited skills base) and financial resources to reverse the trend, and
- lack of support to bring about change (because not enough is known by enough people of the wide ranging issues associated with management, conservation, biodiversity and value of the Peaks).

1.8 In April 1996 Doug Smith and Nick Williams produced “Diana’s Peak National Park: the management plan for 1996-2001”, Agriculture and Forestry Department St Helena. The responsibility for implementing restoration works on the Peaks has rested with the Environmental Conservation Section. This has been done with little external support and with a relatively small budget. Since 1996 the ecological restoration work and species recovery efforts have had outstanding successes and some failures. Notably, significant progress has been achieved in improving the status of the Tree Fern Thicket in Diana’s Peak National Park (DPNP). Continuity and timeliness of effort is absolutely vital to achieving successful ecological restoration of the Peaks and it was the inability to achieve this across all areas where initial alien plant clearance has been carried out that has resulted in deterioration of some compartments, principally where Flax plantation or Buddleia and Bilberry scrub has been removed and replaced with Whiteweed. More support and resources are needed if we are to ensure continuity and timeliness of effort and succeed in reducing the threats.

The Peaks are a special place of outstanding natural and scenic beauty with their own unique mix of ancient and unusual plants and animals found nowhere else on earth. They are an important ‘asset’ for the island as a place for education, recreation and tourism. In addition, water from springs and streams with catchments within the Peaks provides a significant proportion of the overall water supply for St Helena. Expansion of the native plants in the catchment areas could provide long-term benefits to the island in relation to ground water reserves.

It is timely that we review, update and expand the management plan so that we can be confident that as the Island works towards achieving sustainable development with improved access that it will be able to realize the potential economic benefits by maintaining the very assets upon which the development is based.

1.9 The plan establishes a framework for the management of the Peaks. It sets out the basic philosophy for the conservation and development of the Peaks and provides strategies for solving problems and achieving identified management objectives over a 15 - year period (under a three year rolling plan). It is a working document to guide management, implementation and planning. The purpose of the plan is to reduce the level of threat to St Helena’s endemic upland habitats and species by supporting the expansion of the area of Peaks under management, facilitated by cross-sector planning and involvement in managing and maintaining the habitats of the Peaks.

1.10 The Vision for the Central Peaks is “for St Helena to manage and restore the native habitats and species of the Peaks, valued by present and future generations for recreation, education, tourism, and water catchment.”

1.11 The Protected Area Plan contributes to achieving this vision and has as its 15 year goal “To rehabilitate and manage the existing native Peaks forest habitats and expand their area by 20% ( or 3 hectares), including corridors linking DPNP to High Peak, made possible by

secured sustainable funding and improved education, visitor access and interpretation of the Peaks developing social awareness and responsibility”.

1.12 The aim of the Protected Area Plan is: “A detailed 3 year management plan in place and implemented with detailed prescriptions that illustrate the existing and new areas to be managed and rehabilitated in order to achieve an expansion of Peaks habitats in DPNP and at High Peak (including corridors in between), with a clear link to complementary funding, human resources and verifiable performance and education indicators”. The aim outlines what the plan wants to achieve in three years and its contribution to the goal.

The timeframe for the plan is a three-year rolling plan, with an annual review that will be achieved through continued involvement of stakeholders, of which ANRD has the main responsibility, working together on agreed objectives and action.

1.13 The Peaks Protected Area activity table (8.2) sets out the actions needed to achieve the aim and objectives of the plan.

1.14 A National Park Authority is proposed who will be responsible for ensuring timely monitoring and reviews. Updating of the plan will flow from the recommendations of the review. Additionally a protected areas working (e-) group is proposed to support the Authority.

1.15 The Peaks PAP proposes the establishment of an extended Peaks National Protected Area (as the future Peaks National Park) that links all the Peaks across the ridges, including Diana’s Peak National Park, High Peak and Peak Dale, broadly extending across the upland ridges along the 600m contour to the Peaks (see Figure 2). It is proposed that a Peaks Protected Area would be made up of different zones, including Nature Reserve areas and buffer areas that would have different conditions attached. Some areas would include Green Heartland which would simply remain as such with no additional criteria attached. The rationale behind this is to bring together the management and strategic planning for the uplands within one protected area.