



MATT PALMER

INTRODUCTION

This photographic project began as a response to the 2018-19 Tasmanian fires. That summer, fires caused by dry lightning and an unprecedented lack of rainfall in areas of Western Tasmania would combine to destroy 210,311 hectares, including 95,000 hectares of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The perimeter of the fires was 1,854 km, and the fire fronts were often in difficult-to-reach places. In real terms, this fire front is roughly the distance between Brisbane, Queensland, and Hobart, Tasmania. For Americans, longer than Seattle to San Diego, or for Europeans London, England to Lecce, Italy.

The fire claimed many vulnerable landscapes that have historically been too wet to burn. It struck me when photographing these places how narrow the distance between life and destruction was. The project later expanded to include the Fingal Valley fires of 2020. At the time, I had moved to Falmouth on Tasmania's East Coast, and the fires burned along the primary access road to the rest of Tasmania, 30 km down the road. These fires would claim over 33,200 hectares and threatened the sensitive Ben Lomond National Park, which was thankfully prevented by the exhaustive efforts of firefighters.

The following images depict these struggles. They contain death, life, hope, devastation, and sometimes beauty. Some images may cause distress for those who strongly empathize with nature.

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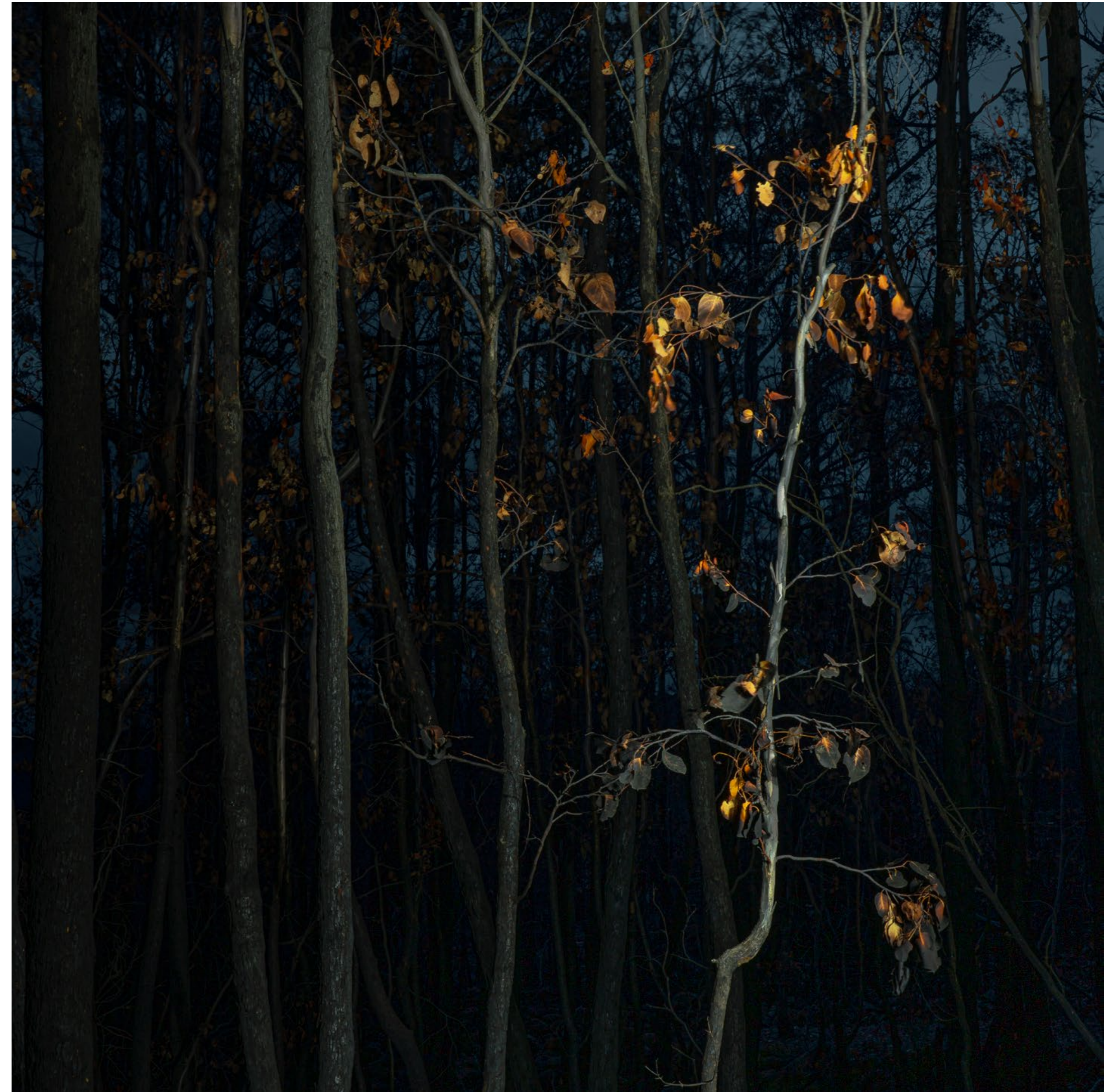


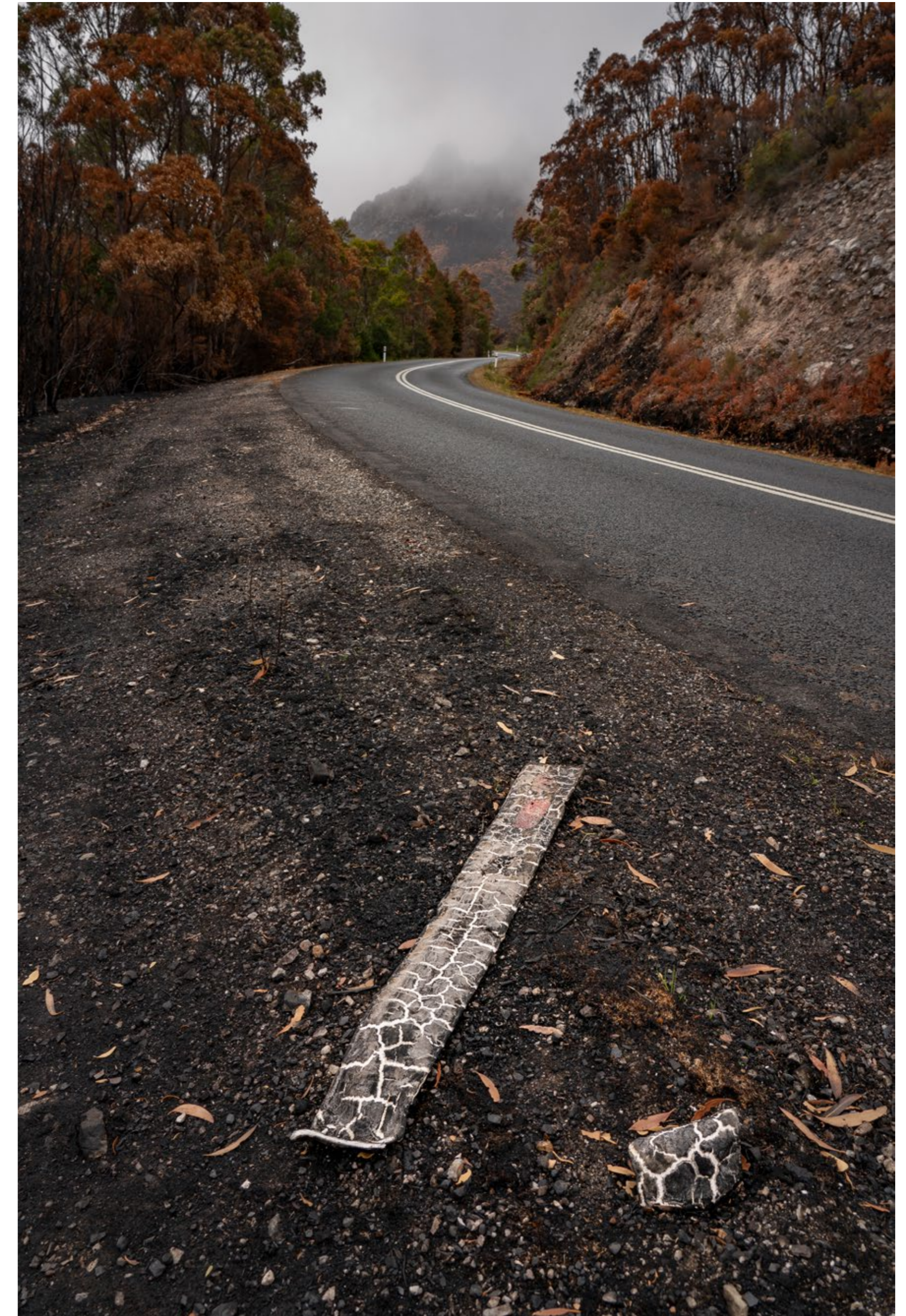


Hazard reduction burns near Hobart, Tasmania in March 2018.



Hazard reduction burns near Hobart, Tasmania in March 2018.





Gordon River Road near the Needles. | February 2019



Recovering button grasses near the Needles. They remind me of echidnas (or hedgehogs) roaming the forest floor. | February 2019



Fire damage near the Needles. The area with the tracks would have been impassable pre-fire. | February 2019



The Needles. | February 2019



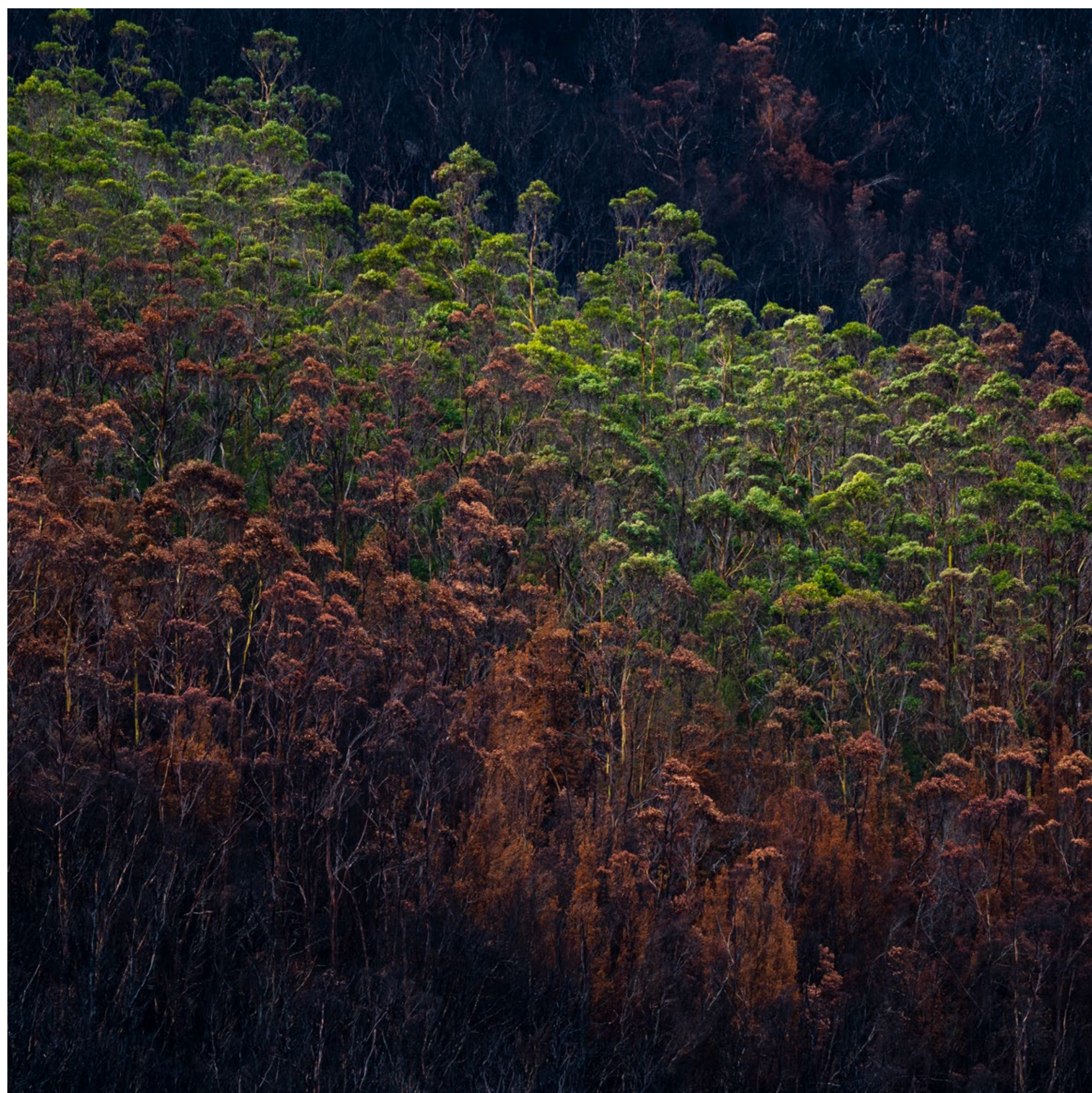
Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park | February 2019



Scorched ground with sprouting button grasses in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | February 2019



Rain hits fire damaged areas of Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | March 2019





Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | March 2019



Sun setting on a burnt hill in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | March 2019



Florentine alternative compositions. These are burnt trees, not autumnal. | February 2019



Florentine (two images combined to include Black Cockatoos at sunset). | March 2019



Bushfire regrowth in infrared. Southwest National Park. | April 2019



Regrowth in destroyed forest (left), Last light hitting burnt forest on a hill (right) in Southwest National Park. | April 2019

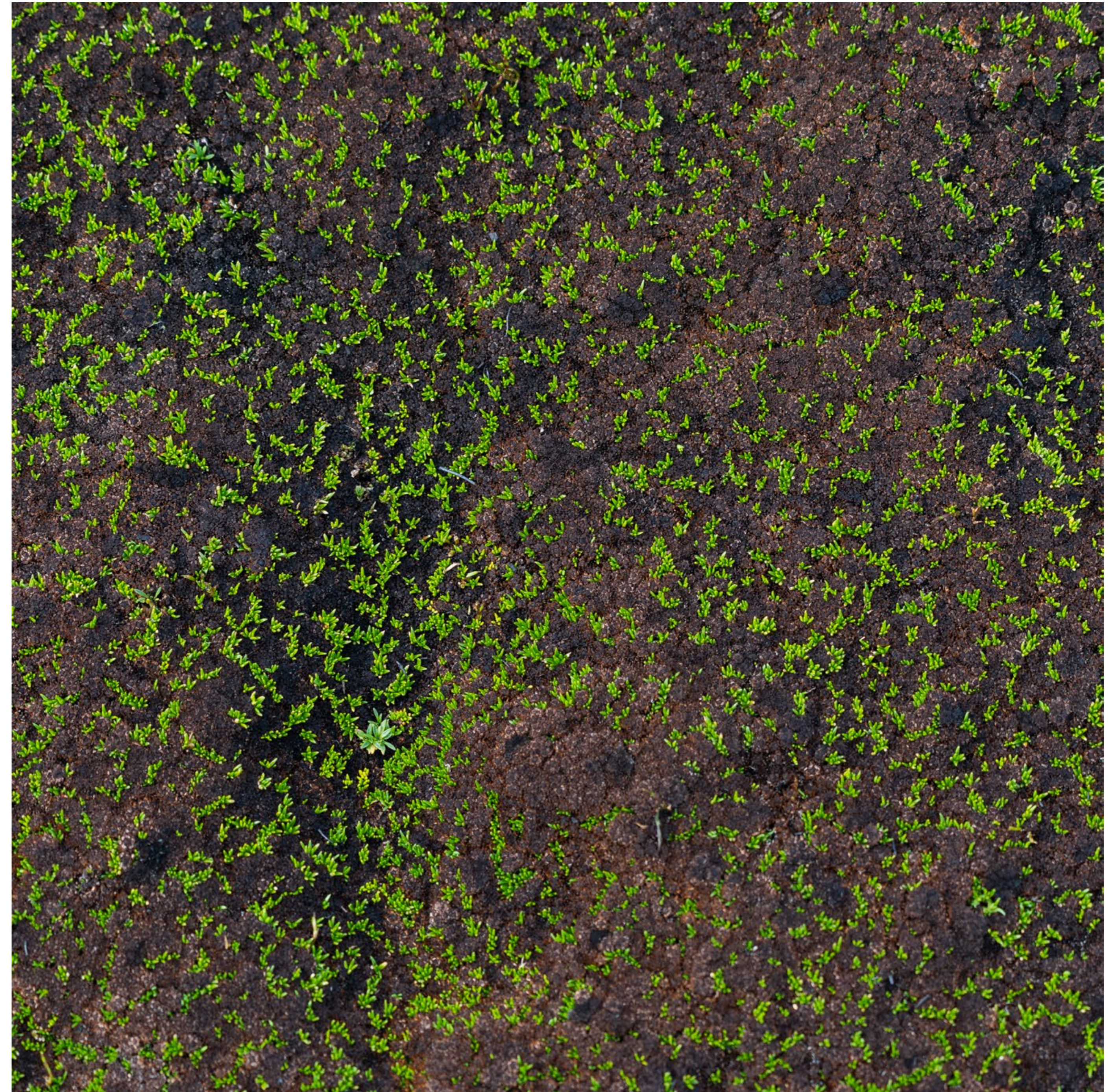




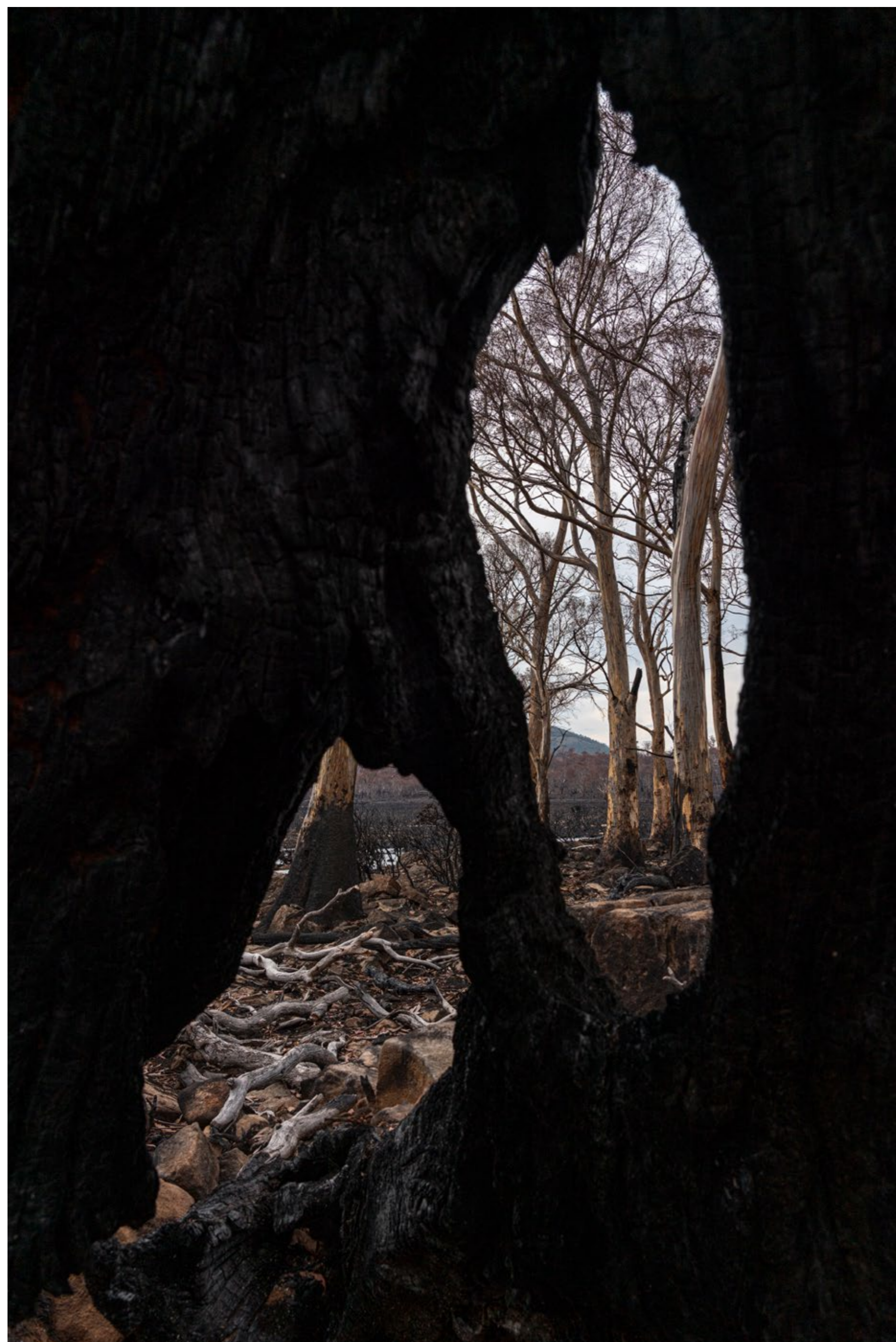
Southwest National Park. | April 2019



Devastated landscape at Great Lakes, Central Plateau. | April 2019



Burnt bark (left) and forest floor regrowth (right) in the Central Plateau area. | April 2019





The beginnings of regrowth at Great Lakes, Central Plateau. | April 2019





Forest raven flying over burnt scrub in Great Lakes, Central Plateau. | April 2019



Hazard reduction burns at Knocklofty Reserve near Hobart. | May 2019



Hazard reduction burns at Knocklofty Reserve near Hobart, from kunanyi Mount Wellington. | May 2019



Hazard reduction burns at Knocklofty Reserve near Hobart. | May 2019



Regrowth in Hartz Mountains National Park. These are burnt trees, not autumnal. | May 2019



Hartz Mountains National Park. These are burnt trees, not autumnal. | May 2019



Flame Tree (two images combined to include local Sulphur-crested Cockatoo). My intention is for images featuring wildlife to generate conversations around loss of habitat. | May 2019



Forestry and fires combine on the border of Hartz Mountains National Park to devastate habitat. | May 2019



There are suggestions that logging of native forests is allowing fires to spread further due to the removal of wet areas of forest which act as natural fire barriers. | May 2019



Regeneration (two images combined to include subtle flying Currawong). | May 2019



Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | June 2019





Collapsing forest in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. Walking through this scrub destroyed my outer layers! | June 2019



Button grass regrowth from above in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | June 2019





Recovering button grasses in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | June 2019



Recovering button grass in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | June 2019



Walking through destroyed forest in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | June 2019



The hope of rain Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. | June 2019



Fire damage near Mount Anne, Southwest National Park. | June 2019



Grass regrowth in Southwest National Park. | June 2019



Sole survivor. Miraculous regrowth on a completely charred hill in Southwest National Park. | June 2019



Burnt hill in front of Mount Anne, Tasmania's 6th highest peak. | June 2019



I nicknamed the rock on the left 'Avatar Rock' and revisited it many times during the project. Southwest National Park. | June 2019





Chaos & Cold (two images combined to include local Rosella). My intention is to create thoughts of the animals lost here and how this habitat has been lost. | July 2019





Forestry and fires bordering Hartz Mountains National Park. | September 2019





Southwest National Park. | September 2019



Close ups of fire affected forest in Southwest National Park. | September 2019



Wallaby (left) and wombat (right) forage for food in fire damaged Great Lakes. | October 2019



Fire damage along the Gordon River Road. Engineers had been evaluating the safety of roadside trees for months and removing those that posed risk of collapse. | November 2019





View from the front yard in Falmouth with Fingal fire smoke. | December 2019



Smokey afternoon light at Henderson Lagoon, East Coast. | December 2019



A family of magpies perch on a tree in front of the Fingal fire front. | December 2019





Uncertainty. Fingal Fires. | December 2019



Fingal fires. | December 2019



Fingal fires blaze towards Ben Lomond National Park and Stacks Bluff. | December 2019



Fingal fires at dusk (left) and Fingal fires at night (right). | December 2019



The Fingal fires split into multiple fronts on either side of the town, threatening it from two sides. | January 2020



The Fingal fires second front. Fortunately it is more difficult for fires to travel downhill, although ember attacks are a constant threat. | January 2020





St Helens waterways filled with Fingal fires smoke. | January 2020



Constant helicopter traffic dumping water and fire retardants on the Fingal fires. | January 2020



Fingal fires. | January 2020



Fingal fires. | January 2020



Fingal fires dwarfs the constantly rotating helicopters. | January 2020





Fire affected areas under Ben Lomond National Park. | March 2020



Leaves in ash filled puddles (left). Fairy wren in burnt forest (right). | March 2020



Scarred. Fingal fires. | March 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you for viewing this e-book documenting my experience of the 2018-19 Tasmanian bushfires and Fingal fires. It wasn't long after this that the project was put on ice due to Covid-19, and then a move to Bright, Victoria, where I now run a Landscape Photography gallery with photographer Mieke Boynton.

A big thank you to all the firefighters, support teams, and community volunteers who helped battle these bushfires over many months until rain was able to come. Even after the fires went out, patrols were constant for months to ensure any underground fires still burning would not cause new flare-ups. Volunteers entered forests with food for native animals that were struggling to survive.

It's their dedication that ensured the great loss to habitat and natural areas was not even more devastating. Their work on the Fingal Fires also prevented fires from breaching Ben Lomond National Park, which homes Tasmania's third-highest peak.

These photographs all depict scenes that could and can be seen throughout Tasmania. Some images (all labeled) contain birds composited from other photos taken in the same areas to generate thought and discussion around habitat loss, which were presented as a stand-alone series. It's easy to forget that many animal lives were lost in these now barren or affected environments.

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If you'd like to support future projects please feel free to donate via paypal to hello@mattpalmer.co or you can purchase landscape photography prints at alpinelight.com.au.

Not all of the images in this book are already available as prints.

For any special requests email hello@mattpalmer.co



