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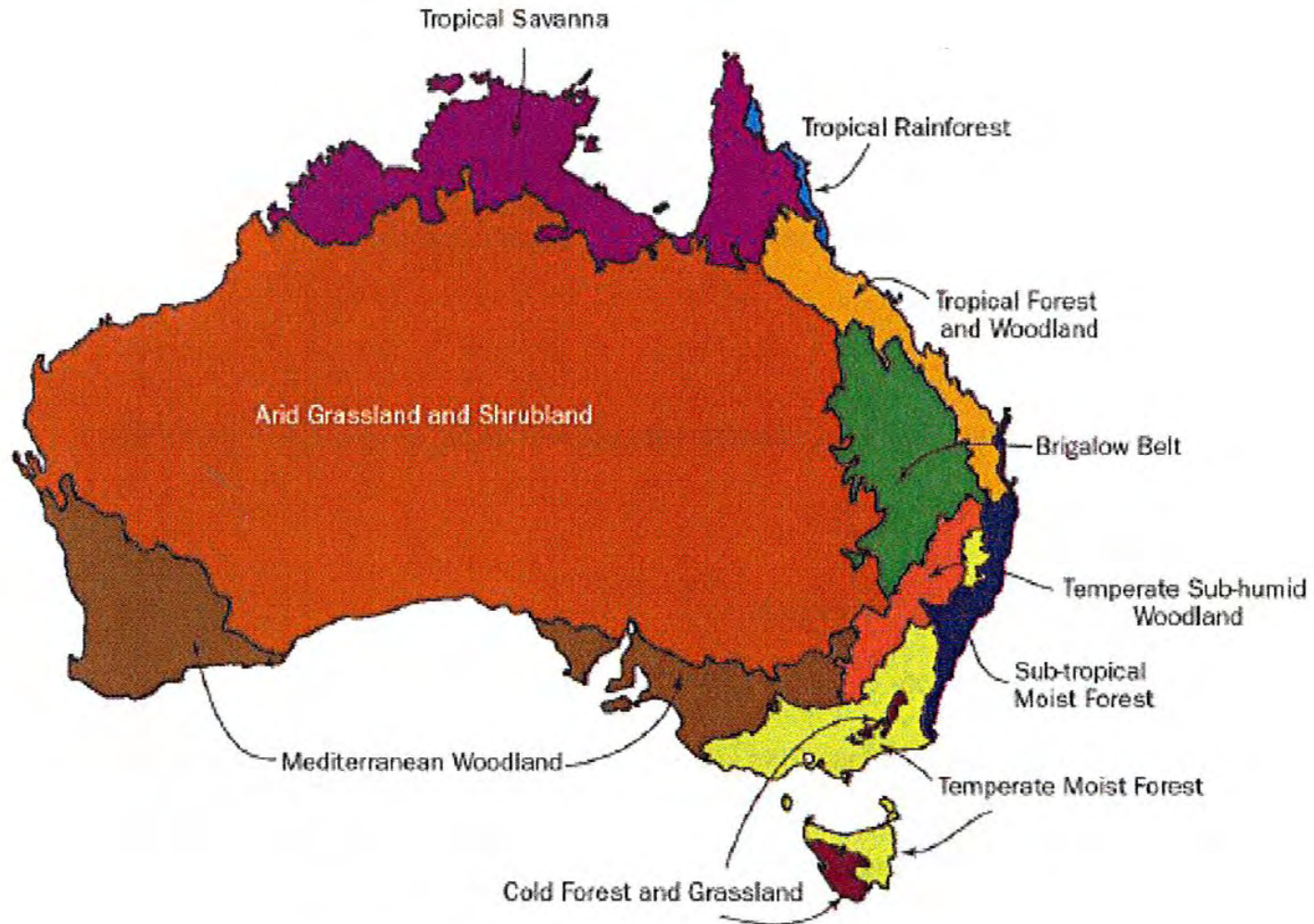
*Evolution of canopy ecotourism  
in Australia: experiences from  
the land down under*

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Steve Turton, JCU/CSIRO  
Tropical Landscapes Joint  
Venture, James Cook  
University, Australia



# Australian Vegetation Types

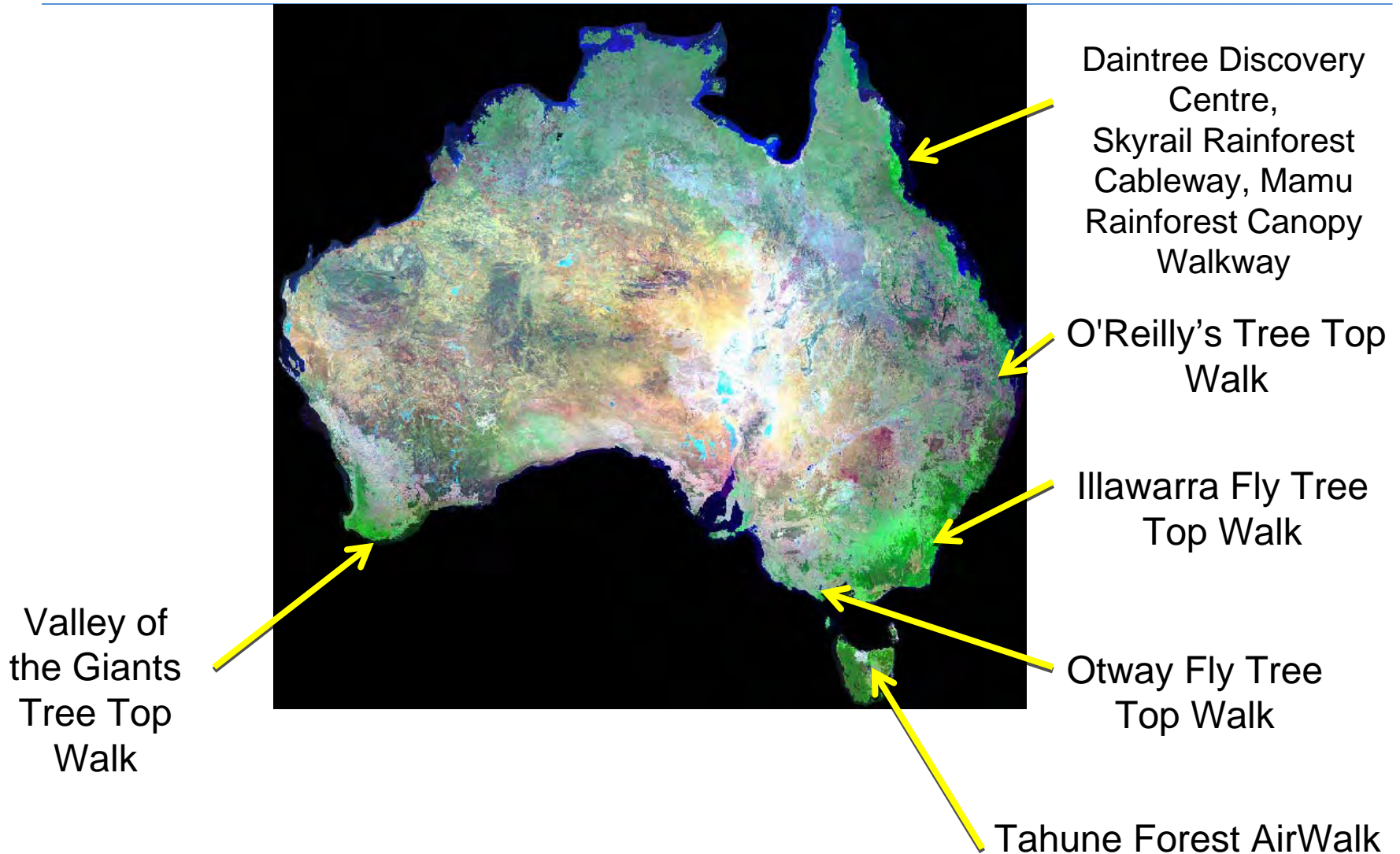


# Australia from space

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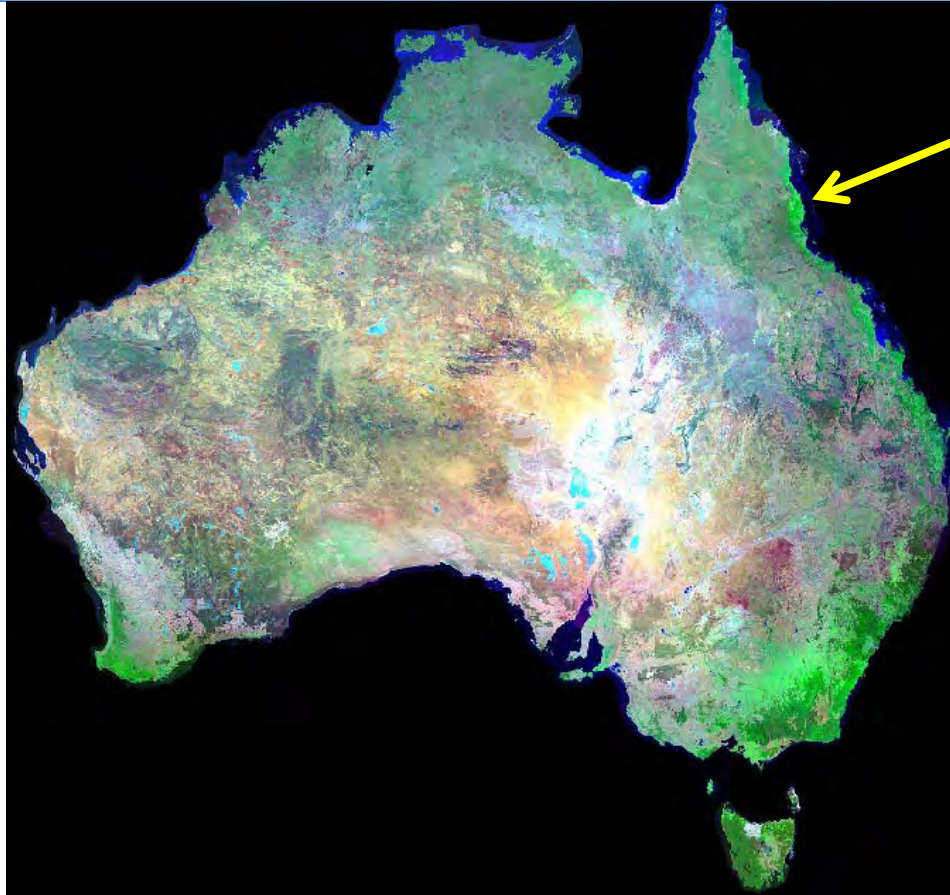


# Canopy ecotourism in Oz



# Canopy ecotourism in Oz

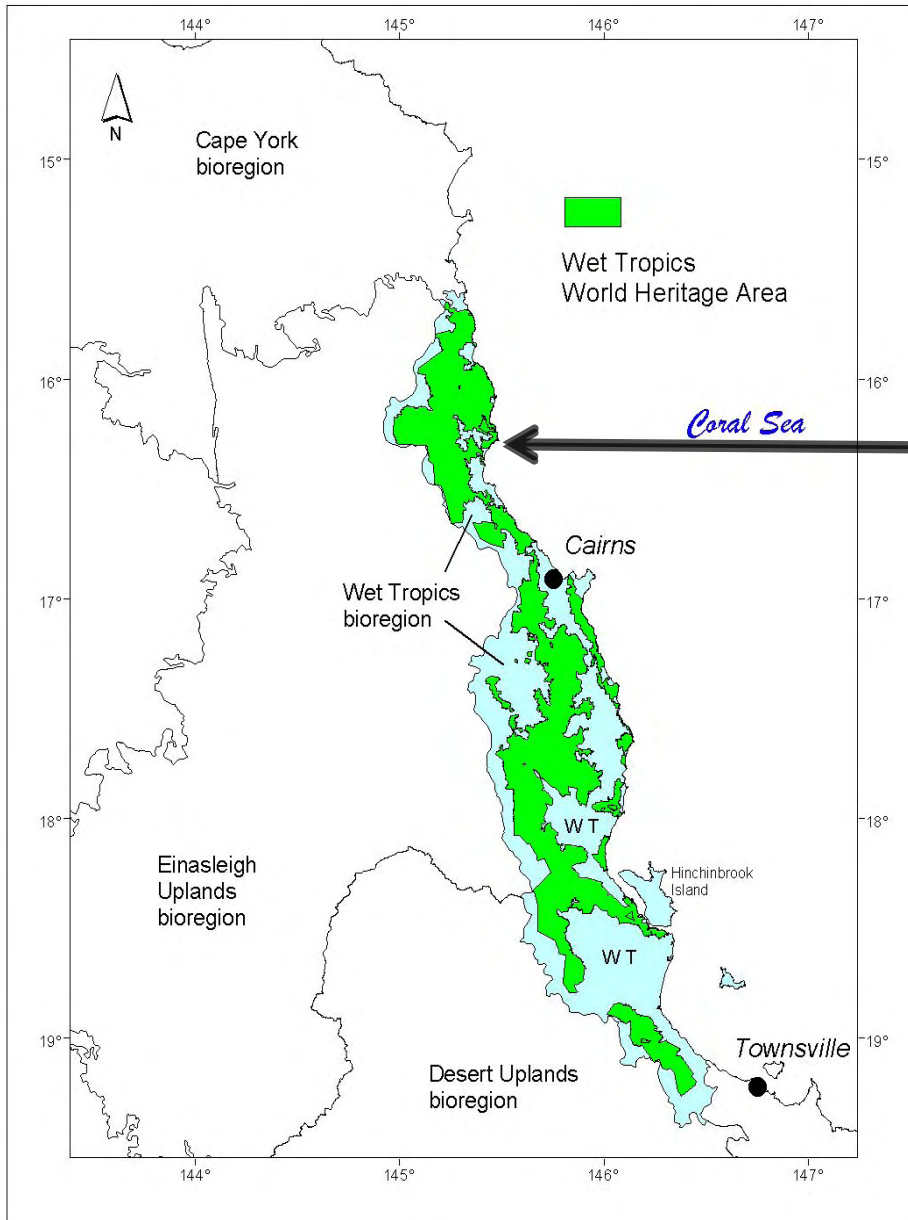
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**Daintree  
Discovery Centre,  
Skyrail Rainforest  
Cableway, Mamu  
Rainforest  
Canopy Walkway**

# Canopy ecotourism in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

Daintree Discovery Centre



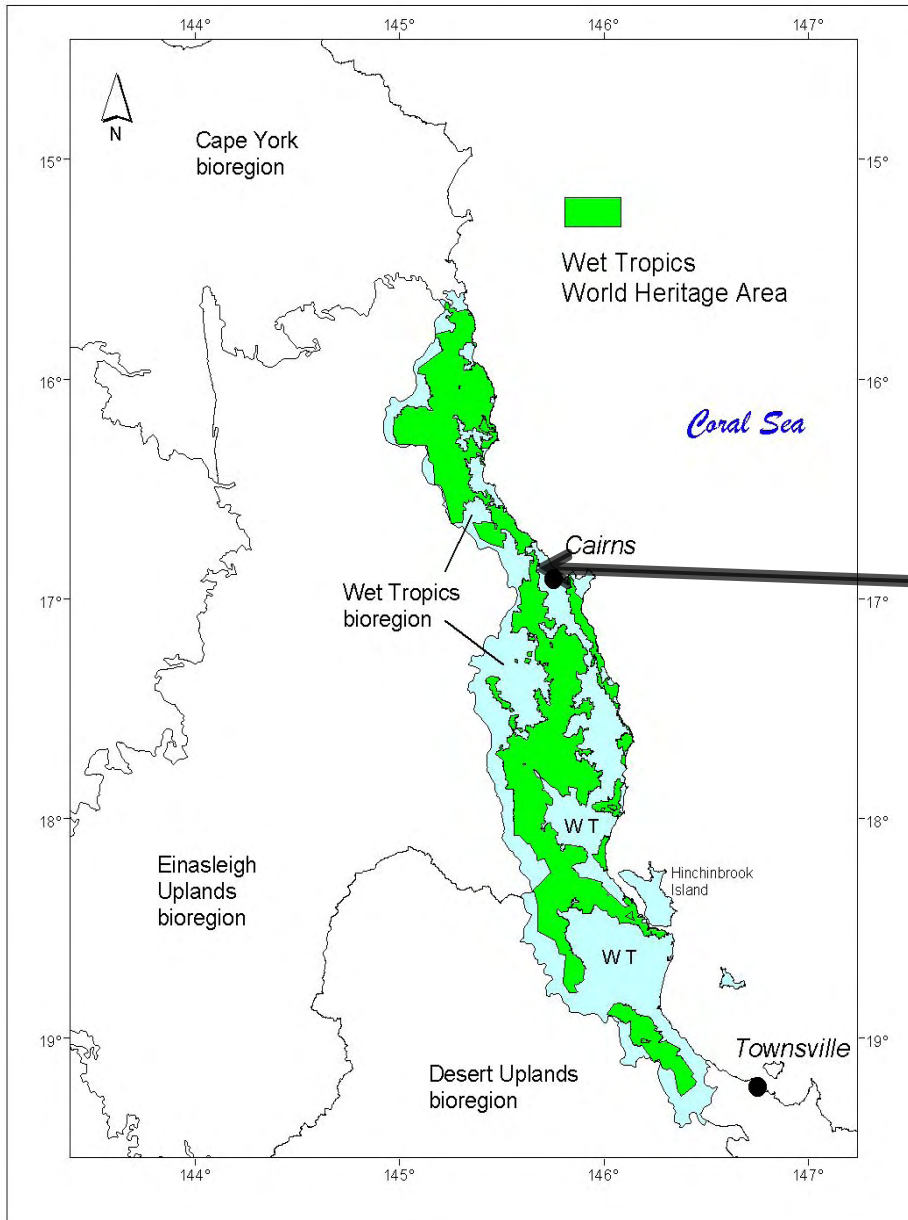
# Daintree Discovery Centre

- Opened in 1989 but with ground level walkway only
- Award winning operation in sustainable ecotourism
- Private company with freehold lowland tropical rainforest land adjacent to World Heritage Area
- Currently has a 23m high canopy tower, aerial walkway and comprehensive display centre
- Guided walks and multi-lingual audio guide available (includes natural and Aboriginal cultural heritage)
- James Cook University CO<sub>2</sub> flux site (part of interpretation)



# Canopy ecotourism in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

Skyrail Rainforest Cableway

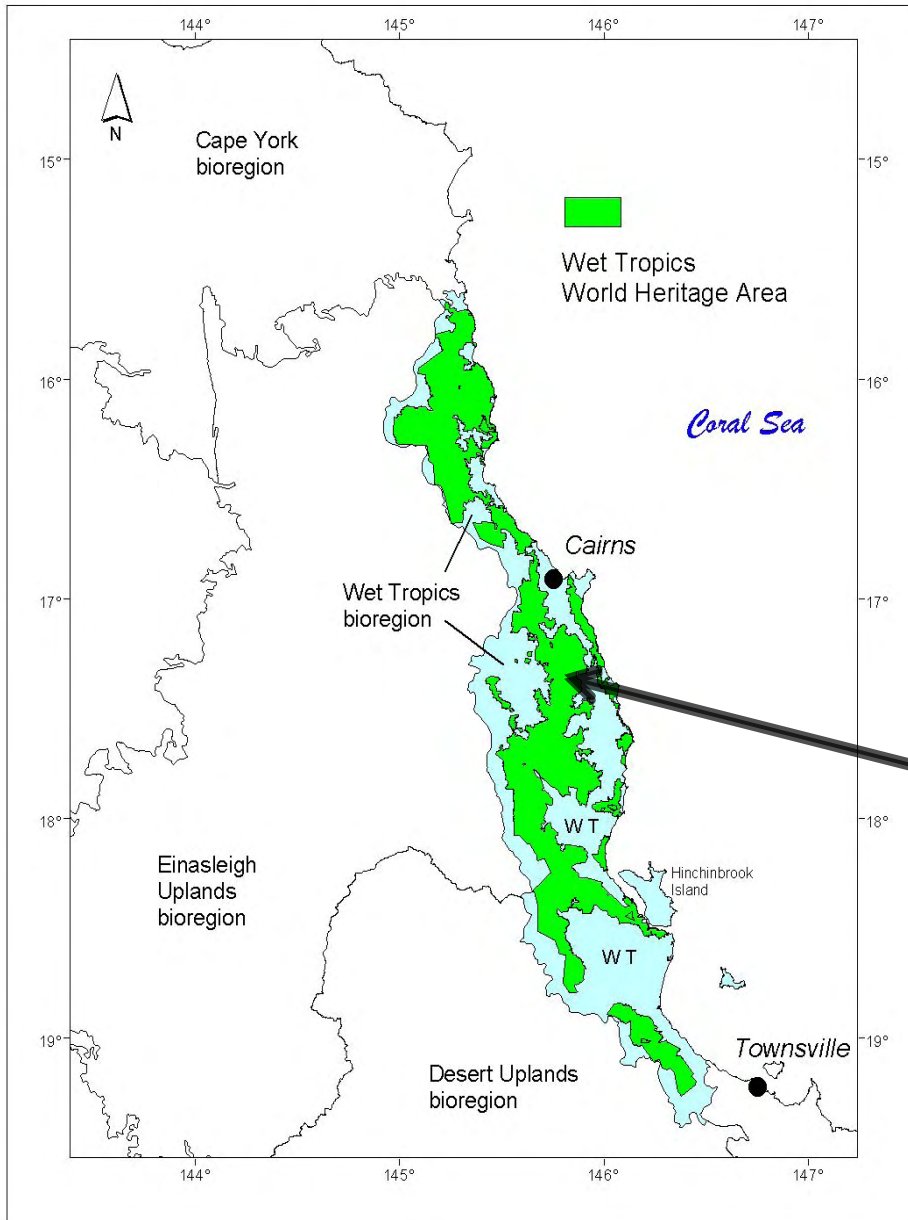


# Skyrail Rainforest Cableway

- Opened in 1995 following stringent environmental requirements enforced by Australian Government
- One of Australia's premier tourist attractions (multi-award winning operation)
- Private company with lease over space within and above the World Heritage Area
- 7.5km in length along a tropical rainforest altitudinal gradient from near sea level to over 600m asl
- Interpretation centre and guided walks include natural and cultural (Aboriginal) heritage
- Has a not-for-profit foundation (launched in 2005) to support rainforest research, education and outreach
- Long term phenology project along the transect (JCU)



# Canopy ecotourism in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area



Mamu Rainforest Canopy Walkway



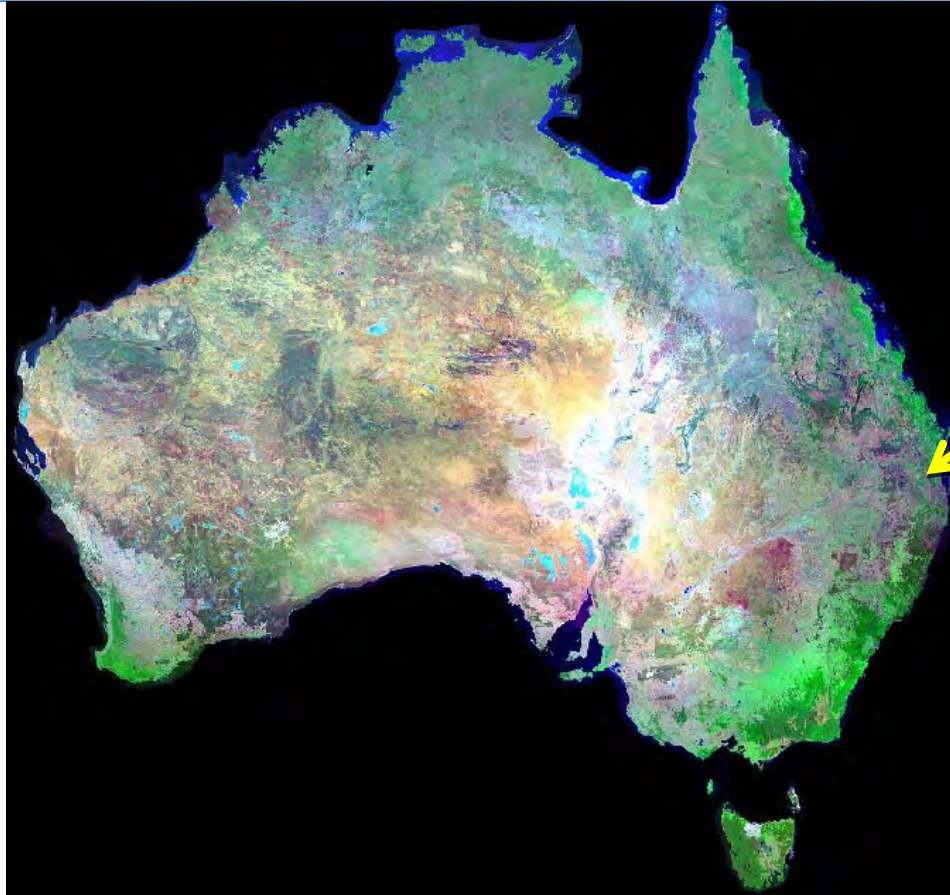
# Ma:Mu Rainforest Canopy Walkway

- Opened in 2008 (constructed after Cyclone Larry)
- Named after the Aboriginal people of the area
- Publically owned and managed by Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management (located in World Heritage Area)
- Heads of Agreement exists between the Traditional Owners and the federal, state and local government
- Elevated walkway is 1.1km long, with 340m elevated to a max height of 15m in complex tropical rainforest (recovering from Cyclone Larry)
- Walkway has three cantilevered lookouts and a tower rising 37m above the forest floor providing superb gorge views



# Canopy ecotourism in Oz

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**O'Reilly's Tree  
Top Walk**

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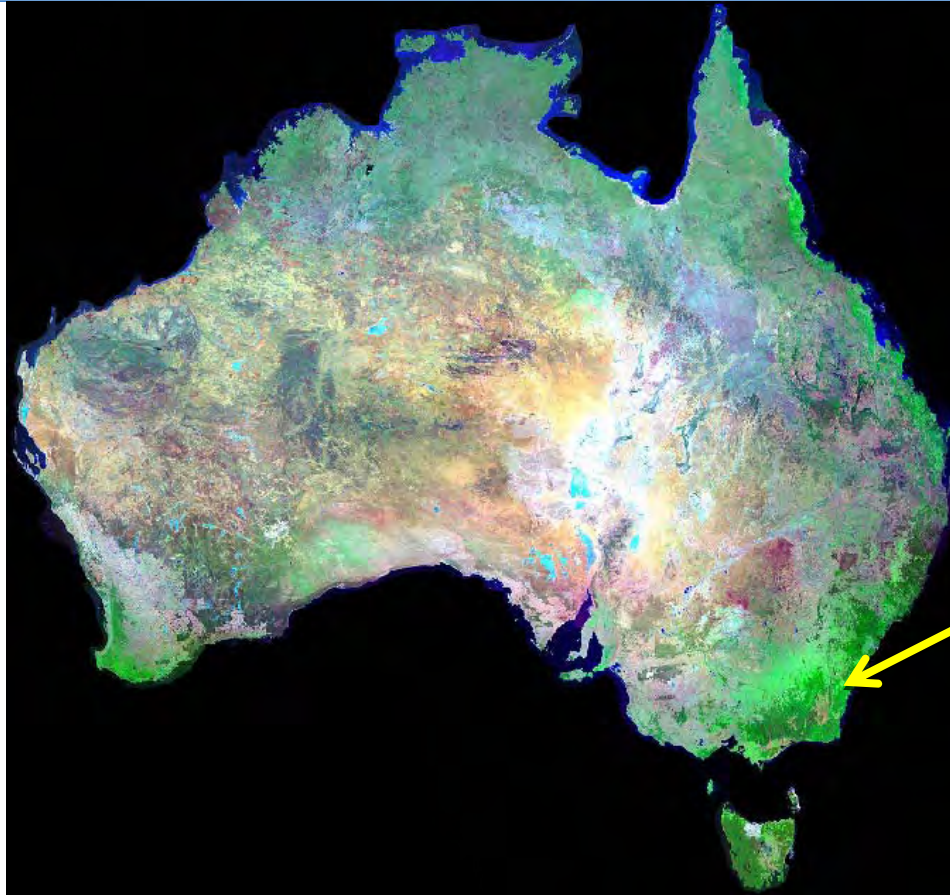
# O'Reilly's Tree Top Walk

- Australia's first treetop walk (it opened in 1987) is made of wood rather than the steel used in newer counterparts
- The walk, 300m from O'Reilly's Guesthouse in Lamington National Park in the Gold Coast hinterland, is 180m long and made up of nine suspension bridges
- Most of the walk is 15m above ground and there are two observation decks in a strangler fig above the walkway; the higher is at 30m
- Privately owned operation in subtropical rainforest and adjacent to Lamington NP



# Canopy ecotourism in Oz

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**Illawarra Fly  
Tree Top  
Walk**

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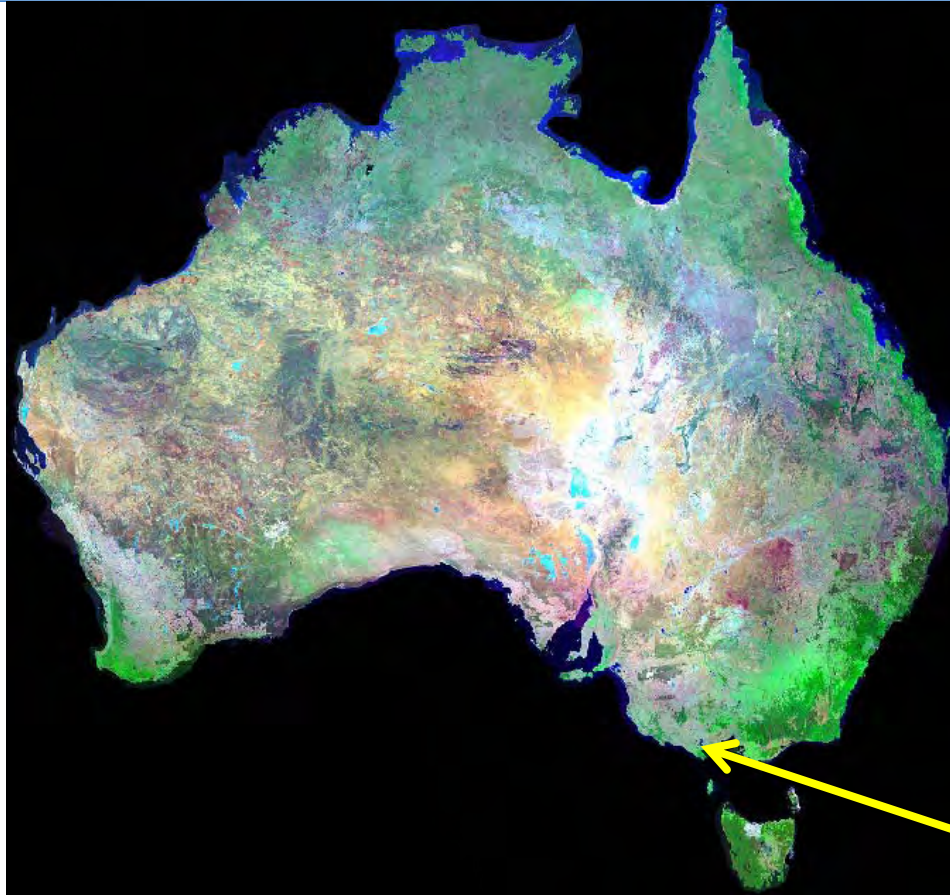
# Illawarra Fly Tree Top Walk

- Opened in 2008, private operation
- Located in warm temperate mixed sclerophyll/rainforest of the southern highlands, this 500m walk takes visitors along the Illawarra escarpment at a height of 25m
- A spiral staircase leads to a 45m-high lookout and, from the cantilevered walkway
- Mixture of tourists and day visitors from the Sydney basin



# Canopy ecotourism in Oz

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**Otway Fly  
Tree Top  
Walk**

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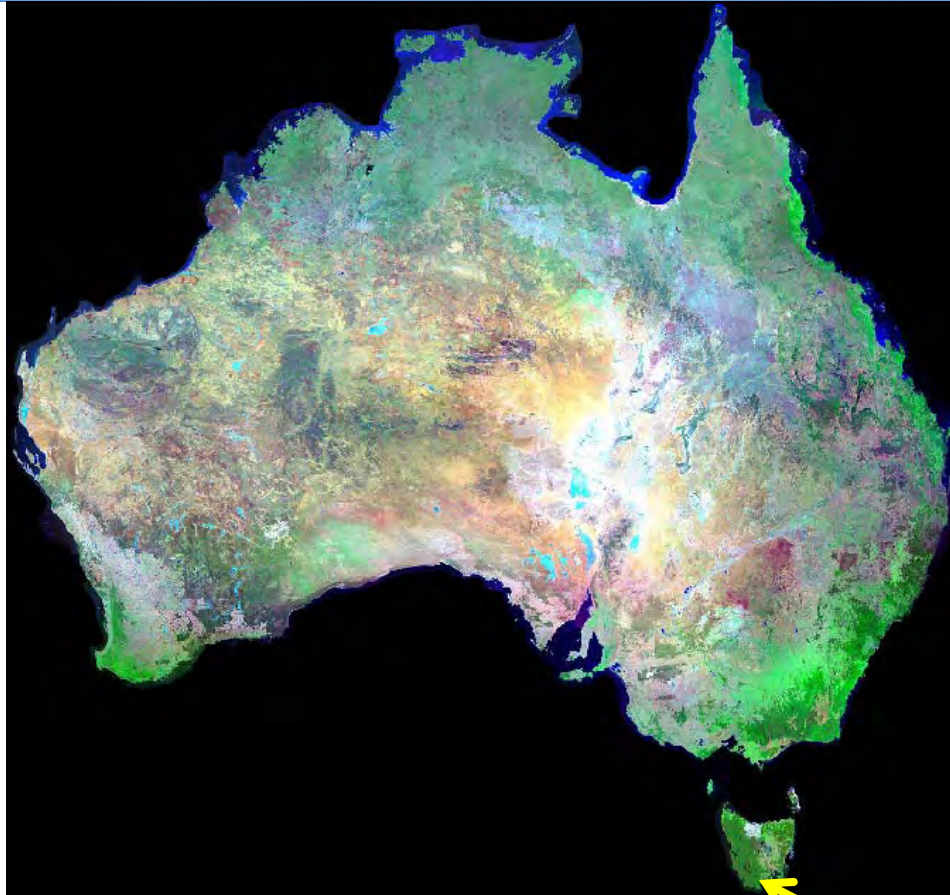
# Otway Fly Tree Top Walk

- Opened in 2003, private operation
- At 600m long and 47m at its highest point, this is the world's longest and highest treetop walk
- Most of the walk is at 25m, ascending gently through a magnificent stand of cool temperate mixed sclerophyll/rainforest featuring myrtle beech, blackwood and mountain ash
- A spiral stairway through the understorey leads to a 45m-high lookout and a springboard cantilever



# Canopy ecotourism in Oz

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**Tahune Forest  
AirWalk**

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# Tahune Forest Airwalk

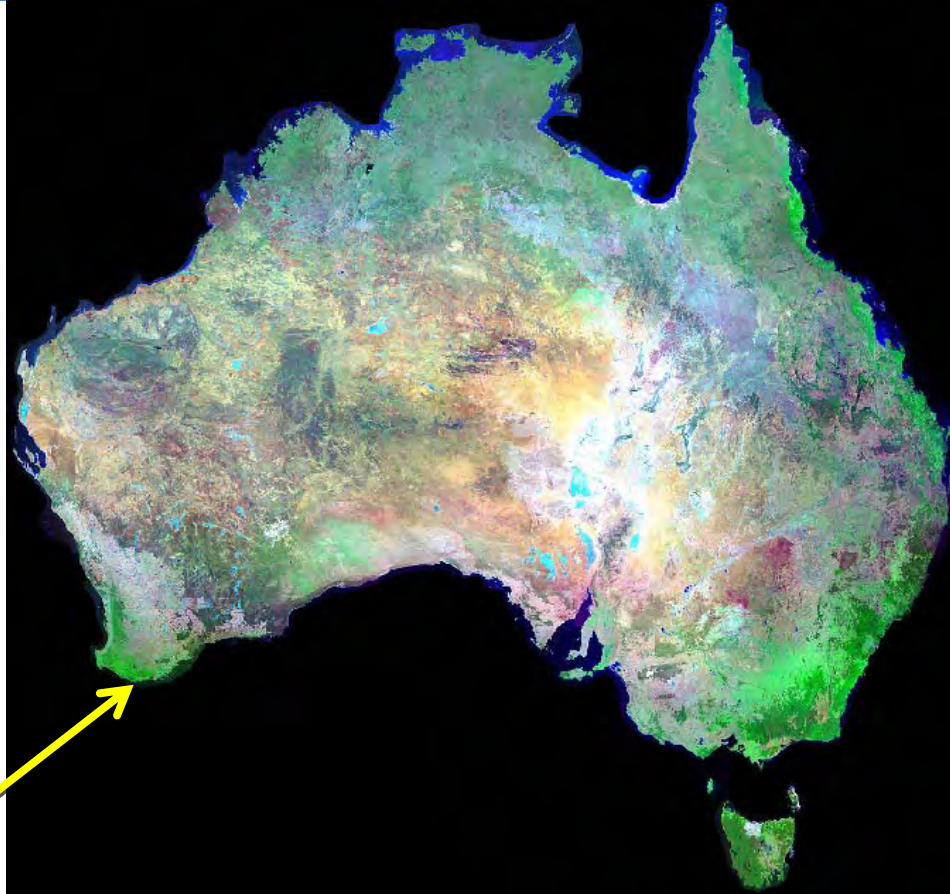
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- Opened in 2001, operated by Forestry Tasmania, a State Govt agency
- This walkway rises 48m above the ground and extends for about 600m over the Tahune State Forest and Picton River
- Cool temperate sclerophyll/rainforest
- It allows for a close-up view of rare tree species, some found only in Tasmania, such as king billy and celery top pine, myrtle, beech, blackwood and sassafras
- Other attractions include the Huon Pine Walk, Eagle Glide (a 400m cable hang-glider ride) and an interpretive centre run by Forestry Tasmania
- Tourists and day visitors from Hobart



# Canopy ecotourism in Oz

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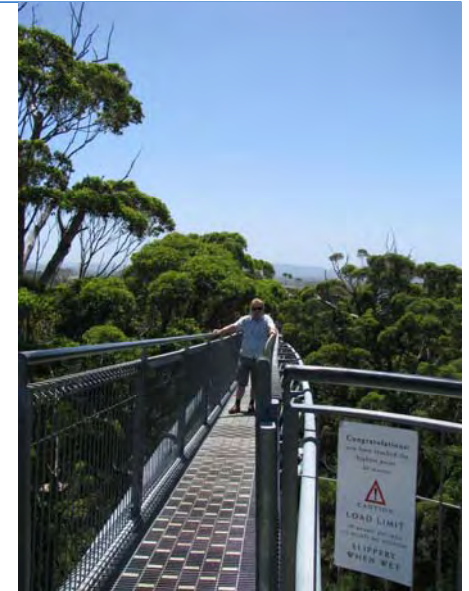


**Valley  
of the  
Giants  
Tree  
Top  
Walk**

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# Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk

- Opened in 1996, operated by State Department of Conservation & Land Management
- Cool temperate/Mediterranean tall sclerophyll forest
- This 600m walkway, which rises up to 40m in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park, winds through a forest of giant tingle trees known as the Ancient Empire
- The park covers about 20,000ha of towering karri and tingle forest as well as coastal heath.
- At ground level there is a boardwalk, suitable for wheelchair users and an interpretation centre



# Summary

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- There are at least 8 major canopy ecotourism facilities in Australia, four of which have been constructed in the last 10 years (oldest 1987, with two opened in 2008)
    - Range from simple wood and wire canopy bridges through to sophisticated steel structures with cantilevers, bridges and towers (and a 7.5km rainforest canopy cableway with gondolas)
  - A diverse range of forest ecosystems are included:
    - Tropical rainforest (lowland through to upland)
    - Subtropical rainforest (upland)
    - Warm temperate sclerophyll/rainforest
    - Cool temperate sclerophyll/rainforest
    - Cool temperate/Mediterranean sclerophyll forest
  - Private ownership dominates (5 out of the 8) and at least one publically owned operation has a Heads of Agreement with the Traditional (Indigenous) Owners (Mamu Canopy Walk)
    - 6 out of 8 have an interpretation centre (quality varies among ventures)
    - Only 1 operation has a foundation focused on research, education and public outreach (The Skyrail Foundation)
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# Future Research

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- Visitor surveys comparing and contrasting visitor expectations & experiences among the 8 canopy ecotourism ventures according to:
    - Private versus publically owned ventures
    - Large versus small canopy ecotourism ventures (high vs low key)
    - Forest/ecosystem type
  - How can we use canopy ecotourism experiences to convey conservation and science to the broader community (outreach)?
    - e.g. climate change, deforestation and species loss
  - Direct and indirect economic benefits of canopy ecotourism to regional areas and communities (national study required)
  - What are current best practices for canopy ecotourism interpretation & infrastructure construction and maintenance?
  - Long term research & monitoring at canopy ecotourism sites
    - Phenology, biodiversity, carbon flux, etc
  - Canopy ecotourism knowledge exchange and capacity building between Australia and developing countries (e.g. Asia/Pacific)
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