

A scenic view of a coastline seen through the silhouettes of tall trees. The foreground is filled with the dark, intricate branches and trunks of several large trees, their leaves creating a dense canopy. Through the gaps in the foliage, a bright, hazy landscape is visible. In the distance, a body of water stretches across the horizon, with a low-lying shoreline and some buildings visible under a pale, overcast sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

**a MOTT
weekend
away**

**to a place where the trees
rise above the clouds**

INTRODUCTION...

Fran Gilje,
MOTT's enthusiastic Social Coordinator,
arranges an action packed planting expedition
to Killarney with the assistance
of historian and local bushcare coordinator,
Susan Savage, who lives at Arborlee -
a rainforest retreat on top of
the Great Dividing Range

photo essay by scott maxwell

THE DATE

May Day weekend 2010

THE MISSION

To revegetate a riparian zone at 'The Head' which is the head of the Condamine River - the longest river system in Australia.

THE TREK

A group expedition through the Gondwana rainforests of Australia's World Heritage area on the southern slopes of Queensland's Great Dividing Range.

THE STORY

On Friday the MOTTly crew (pronounced Motley Creu) rendezvous mid morning at the Aratula Cafe for brunch. This little township west of Boonah, seemed to be buzzing with people when I arrived - there were more people and cars than there were houses and shops.

Fran announces that "the schedule has changed - thanks to a pile of posters on the shop counter that proclaim ROADBLOCKS to Cunningham's Gap - we will detour along the scenic route around Lake Moogerah instead" So we all clambered into the six car convoy and off we headed to this vast stretch of water. The terrain started changing from the flat fertile grain crops to a more undulating landscape with open eucalypt forests with glimpses of craggy peaks and escarpments on the mountain range looming closer and closer.

We passed through and a along a mosaic of bituminized and dirt roads - I so much appreciate not being in the lead - we may have ended up back in Rathdowney - a place we all visited back in January. At last, we arrived at the summit, "did I miss Lake Moogerah?" Jan quips "there it is in front of Mt French" Everybody looks - WOW!!! - being the collective response. The boys scrambled onto the rocks. Jeff announces "Hey, that's Governors Chair named after Governor General Sir Charles Fitzroy in 1854. Also Queensland's first Governor, Sir George Bowen, made regular visits here. He described the view as an 'incomparable



Keaton ponders the heritage furniture while the adults brunch on



Myrtle the new ute gets a work out with Jerry at the wheel and Marion navigating from the back seat



A female king parrot checks us out

Mt Frazer

Mt Edwards

Mt French

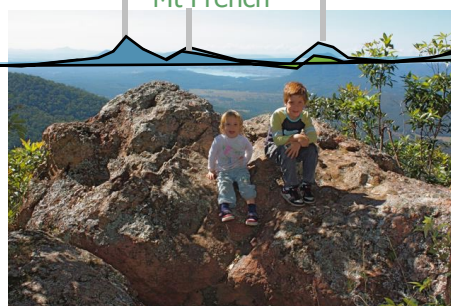
Mt Greville

Mt Alford

Mt Moon

Mt Toowoona
Mt Maroon

panorama' The view is just the same now as it was then, except for the pollution on the horizon, manicured farms, the dams and that linking system of roadways"



Nelson and Keaton relax at the panoramic Governor's Chair Lookout

THE JOURNEY

Just a few hundred metres below the lookout seeped Moss's Well. As we ventured closer through this short, windy rainforest track, the high pitched clanging of tiny bell birds WW, muted, albeit momentarily, the baritone conversations of Pat. Everybody laughed upon reaching the well, as it was truly the great Australian understatement. For everybody that missed this adventure "you have to see it to believe it!" When the laughing subsided Keaton actually managed to fall in to the 'bottomless pit' however, he was quickly scooped out by Suzanne, who is used to quick response emergency action (or should that be, reaction)

After that little walk the convey of cars carried on down the hill and far away through the moist mountainous air to our next destination the Queen Mary Falls Cafe. Being tail end charlie, I stopped numerous times to drink in the view and take photos without the convey politely stopping every time to check if anything was wrong. However, this time, a nice little off road track looked enticing - it grabbed me and off I went. The car followed its nose, the windows were open and a deep untouched ravine was dead ahead. It was such a feeling being alone with the birds, the black boys* and listening to Brahms belting out his best requiem with this spectacular scenery.

Little did I know that Myrtle was lurking behind me and out popped Jerry followed by Marion, Fran and Erika. They heard the ramped up

music, quickly smiled, then joined in the ambience of the occasion by taking photos of each other. Incidentally, the ravine was steep and sheltered the tallest, thickest Hoop Pines *Araucaria cunninghamii* that I had ever seen. They rose majestically above the surrounding slopes and reminded me of growing up on Magnetic Island. We could have stayed for

hours but Fran reminded us that the others would be missing us. Finally, we caught up with the convoy somewhere on the side of the road and arrived at the cafe where we received a warm welcome by Susan and Clive. Everybody was talking at once - so much had happened, yet the trip had barely begun. The excitement was building to see the great falls, but first, a late lunch was needed to appease the appetites before the hike down to the Queen Mary Falls.

Once lunch was finished, we stepped outside to see lots of galahs, rosellas and king parrots on the ground and in the wattles. We resisted the temptation to feed them so it did not upset the balance of nature. So off we ventured to Spring Creek to look up at the falls. Not everybody wanted to go all the way down because thoughts of having to climb back up proved a bit daunting. And, it was such a big lunch after all.

The Queen Mary Falls were spectacular.

The rock formation of basalt and trachyte had been worn away since ancient times and I could see faces peering out of the highlights and shadows. Inspiration for a drawing sometime soon.



Up and way from Moss's Well - a freshwater spring discovered by Edward Moss in 1850



*This vine infestation is all but engulfing this majestic brush box *Eucalyptus saligna**



Erika taking a photo of Fran, Marion and Jerry with the sound of music in the air and Myrtle hiding in the trees on far left



The car convoy weave their way along one lane roads while dodging the locals



One of the crimson rosellas gets up close and wonders whether we have any spare food

[*OK - I should have said grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea preissii*) but that would have ruined the alliteration]



Queen Mary Falls with faces in the sentinels



Jeff and Nelson emerge from the sub tropical rainforest to see the dramatic fall of water

THE VIEW THE DRIVE THE EATING



Driving along the top of the world and seeing the ancient forests on one side and cleared pastoral land for cattle grazing on the other side



Driving in the valley between the falls at Lion's Gate with Cambanoora Gorge in the background



Brown's Falls flowing over the basalt columns creating a vapour mist to walk through and feel energised

After getting our breath back from the hike up through the Main Range National Park we joined up with Keith who was sitting watch over the cars nestled under the towering eucalypts. He also saw a lyre bird rummaging about.

Next stop - Brown's Falls - we just cannot get enough of the waterfalls. The drive was breathtaking. One can only imagine what it was like pre pioneering days - it would have been absolutely stunning - no need for us to go and revegetate degraded areas.

Most of the clearing in this valley was done by the late 1800s for timber being used for quality building and furniture then subsequently the dairy industry helped the local families survive. The farming families that still live in the area make a living out of beef cattle.

Most of the forest that surrounds this area is now National park and World heritage listed.

The amazing thing that I noticed was that nearly all the cattle I saw were standing under stands of trees that were pocketed right throughout the rambling green countryside. The lush green grass was growing in the shade right up to the trunks of these isolated trees.

The short scramble up the creek to Brown's Falls was fun and nobody slipped in. It was starting to get dark and being covered by a thick, healthy canopy - it was almost like night. Out came the cameras and a synchronistic display of flashes followed suit. Preferring natural light, I hardly ever use a flash, so the camera was set on a slow shutter speed (15 seconds) and with a deep breath, click - hand held.

It took a few deep breaths to get one this one (on the left) It is times like this you really do need a tripod to do a photo justice - the compromise of travelling light.

Am I seeing faces in the rocks again - or is it just me?

Time to head back. Susan led the convoy back to Killarney and the group divided into who was staying at the Pub and the caravan park. Within half an hour we reassembled into the dining room for dinner. We took up half the restaurant, the other half being a mixture of locals and Brisbanites. The menu* offered the famous local Angus beef or fish imported directly from the Mekong Delta. My choice was a no brainer, besides who in their right mind would eat catfish if they knew what it was and where it came from?

After dessert, Pat watched football on TV and everybody else hit the bunks. I followed Susan and Clive out of town and up the mountain to their nature refuge - Arborlee - a b/b nestled in a 120 acre rainforest wilderness.

What a great way to end day one.

**Yes, there were other culinary delights to choose from - I am just wanting to make a point.*



The planting site with the homestead in the background



Fran rallies the troops into action



Pat does his favourite thing - tackling weeds



Marion deliberates with Jan while Hugh hoes away

THE WEEDING THE DIGGING THE PLANTING & THE EATING

Day two: I woke to see thick mist softening the sub tropical rainforest just outside the cottage window. Next thing I was wandering around the garden tracks trying to photograph the birdlife.

After breakfast I jumped into Susan and Clive's 4x drive and off we went up the garden path, then down the mountain, through the settlement of Mt Colliery, along the sunflower fields then into Killarney to the meeting spot. Lucinda and Robert, Susan's bushcare friends, were there being acquainted with the Mottley crew. Myrtle was stacked to the brim with plants, matics, gloves and buckets. We were all ready - let's go and fulfill our mission!

We arrived at 'The Head' where we were met by our hosts Sandra and Malcolm who escorted us along their beef fattening property to a beautiful spot which is very near being a billabong - there was plenty of shade - it was the perfect location.

Holes were dug in earnest as Marion handed out the plants she had previously assembled at Susan's request. The soil was soft and fertile and bamboo stakes firmly held the protective barriers and copious amounts of mulch was laid. Out came the buckets of water, compliments of the creek that ultimately feeds into the longest river system in Australia, the Murray Darling.

The list of plants we made homes for included;

- Alphitonia excelsa (red ash)
- Auranticarpia rhombifolia (diamond leaf hollywood)
- Angophora subvelutina (rough barked apple)
- Acacia melanoxylon (blackwood)
- Cassurina cunninghamiana (river she-oak)
- Dondonea triquetra (native hop)
- Ehretia accuminata (koda)
- Ficus coronata (creek fig)
- Grevillea robusta (silky oak)
- Lophostemon confertus (brush box)
- Mallotus phillipensis (red kamala)
- Melia azedarach (white cedar)
- Strebeulus brunonianus (whale bone)
- Flindersia collina (leopard wood)
- Euroshinus falcata (ribbon wood)
- Cassine australis (red olive-berry)
- Dyoxylum fraserianum (rosewood)

After the mass planting we went back to the homestead and were treated to a lavish lunch prepared by Sandra in the front garden. Jeff gave a poignant thank you speech to Sandra for her country hospitality and Susan for inviting the MOTTley crew to the picturesque place in the bush. Marion also gave a historical overview of the origins of MOTT to nicely wrap up the days work.

THE TEAM WORK

Happy faces back;
Pat Peek, Jerry Dunford, Robert
Durand, Hugh Preston, Lucinda
Springfield, Clive Savage, Fran Gilje

Happy faces middle;
Jan Russell, Jan Mealy, Susan
Savage, Virginia Lawrence, Erika
Jakeman,

Happy faces front;
Marion Goward, Jeff and Nelson
Mustard, Malcolm Egginton

Missing faces;
Suzanne and Keaton Miller-Mustard
(back at the ranch) Keith Fordyce
(supervising the scarecrow) Sandra
Egginton (preparing lunch) Scott
Maxwell (taking the photograph)



Pat on his knees, Erika and Marion checking things out, Susan about to plant and Suzanne back filling a Cassine australis in the foreground



The aftermath - ready to grow!



THE FOND FAREWELL

After the best site planting lunch that MOTT had ever feasted upon, Susan lead the convoy to the 'Rabbit Proof Fence'. We parked just off the road that overlooked an expansive open valley flanked by the lush mountainous terrain of the Great Dividing Range. Susan informed us that this upper tributary of the Condamine River used to be covered by a magnificent forest of *Araucaria cunninghamii* (Hoop Pine). It was apparently once referred to as being "Black with Hoop" and as the "Black Forest".

Perhaps our next project could be 'bring back the Hoop Pine'?

We walked across the road and discovered heaps of seeds that resembled Black Bean seed pods but covered with fur felt. They had fallen from the *Millettia megaserma* (native wisteria) This led to a nice little pathway under the sub tropical rainforest wire fence Jerry yelled out this must be the rabbit proof fence - and it was! The other side was New South Wales.

Keaton asked "why is this fence here" Jeff proudly responded by saying "to keep the rabbits out"

As we wandered along the border, carefully dodging the *Dendrocnide moroides* (stinging plants) cameras were clicking away at the giant *Lophostemon confertus* (brush box) with clinging epiphytes and the overpowering Watkins strangler figs.

On returning to the cars it was time to bid goodbyes. Jan M headed off back to Brisbane. Jan R and Hugh took a tangent to Murwillumbah. Pat, Virginia and Keith followed Myrtle that Jerry drove with Fran, Marion and Erika. Jeff, Suzanne, Keaton and Nelson were last seen heading towards Warwick or Stanthorpe or Girraween National Park. I wonder if they made it back to Brisbane yet?

I stayed an extra night at Arborlee - great!

Took lots of photos then headed to Legume (trail bike comp), Woodenbong (gymkhana games) Kyogle and then Nimbin (mardi gras fest) +10 000 hippies raging everywhere! Finally arrived the back way to Currumbin and saw a rare golden swamp wallaby standing beside the road.

From the trees to the seas - next morning a dawn surf at the alley top off a relaxing extra long weekend away. It felt like a week and it had to be the best road trip ever! The route resembled an outline of an egg.

We should make this an annual pilgrimage with more MOTTers in a 30 seater SUV bus?

*A wedge-tailed eagle
soars overhead*



*The place
in the past that
was known as
the 'Black Forest'
where remnant
Hoop pine stands
can still be seen*



*A little rock pool
in the rainforest
garden at Arborlee*



*Nimbin in all
its vibrancy*



*A little bit more of
Nimbin's vibrancy*



THE
WEB
ARTICLE



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