



And every evening at sun-down  
I ask a blessing on the town  
For whether we last the night or no  
I'm sure is always touch-and-go

We are not wholly bad or good  
Who live our lives under Milk Wood,  
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first  
To see our best side, not our worst.

From "Under Milk Wood" (The Sunset Poem) by Dylan Thomas

Our monthly meetings are held on the first Friday of every month in the Village Hall, Arcadia Road, Burnham-on-Crouch CMO 8EF. Doors open 2.15pm; meeting starts 2.30pm. Full list of dates: p.3.

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# Sydney to Brisbane

## November/December 2023

The one good thing about travelling alone is that you can do exactly what you want, when you want and how you want. You can change your mind at whim and can be totally and selfishly indulgent. The downside is that you spend a fair amount of time having a conversation with yourself – I return home quite mad! Perhaps that's why the neighbours hear me telling my lawnmower that if it doesn't start it's straight to the tip – it does work though, the mower starts.

Driving from Sydney to Brisbane via the direct route is 917kms, on my journey I drove over double that. I zigzagged up mountains, dropped down into valleys, visited rainforests, drove along winding coasts and visited various wetlands. Seeing nature in Australia is what I go there for and I had 4 weeks to do that.

Leaving Sydney my first stop was the Blue Mountains, a modest drive west. I climbed on a good road winding gently up and reached Katoomba where I had reserved a cabin. At dusk I walked along a trail to the Katoomba Falls lookout. Looking out over the valley, it almost looked like someone had emptied a box of tissues, and the tissues, shining bright white in the lowering sun, floated into the trees and rested there – they were in fact Sulphur Crested Cockatoos seeking out a roosting place – magical. The Eastern Whipbirds were having their final say; the male starts with a long whistle building up to a crack, then the female replies instantly with a tchew-tchew. What a start to my trip. For several days I walked on tracks through the forest, visited waterfalls, enjoyed the birds and butterflies and also the geology of this area. The Blue Mountains must be one of the few ranges in the world where you start at the top and walk down. As you descend the age of the rocks range from 200 million years old to 400 million years old.

I then went south to Kangaroo Valley, a fairly remote spot and stayed in a vintage caravan on a small farm. The alfresco shower and bath were a different experience; with shoulder high corrugated iron fencing on three sides and the rear open to bush you had to keep an eye out for anything that may pass by. I had specifically come here so I could visit an area close by where it is almost guaranteed you will see wombats – my favourite animal. For those that don't know, wombats are nocturnal, are marsupials and have cubed shape droppings (I brought some home as proof!). I was lucky to arrive at a spot where I was alone and spied a wombat emerging from its burrow. It was oblivious to my presence, so I lay flat on the ground and by chance it wandered towards me. It was intent only on filling its stomach with grass that it noisily munched. It got closer and closer and walked slightly to my left, then suddenly realised I wasn't a rock, got nervy and shot off into the bushes. I was in 'wombat heaven'.....

.....Going north on the Pacific Highway I reached the coast and by chance saw a sign for the Hunter Wetlands, so I turned off to investigate. This wetland consists of 7 pools and a river that leads out to sea. Armed with a leaflet and a generous spraying of complimentary mosquito repellent, I followed a self-guided tour passing various ponds, swamp land, reed

marshes a bush tucker garden and a casuarina forest – each habitat attracting different birds. There was also a Freckled Duck captive breeding enclosure. These ducks are some of the rarest in the world and with the help of this program have been downgraded from threatened to vulnerable. In the two hours that I wandered about, I saw only two other people.....

.....Via backwaters and small towns, and a few days later, I saw marked on the map the Cattai Wetlands; I detoured down an unmade track and was so pleased I did, it is one of the nicest wetlands I have walked through. Armed with a leaflet describing in detail what I was seeing, I followed a trail for 2kms. Apart from my informative leaflet, many of the plants and trees had labels, and boards showed what birds I would likely see. Koala bears were present but kept themselves well hidden from me. I walked through a remnant of Swamp Sclerophyll Forest which grows on floodplain land along the coast; apparently this plant community has been listed as endangered, so quite special to see. I passed two types of wetlands; one on my right, a freshwater wetland and one on my left, a tidal brackish wetland. It was a joy being there watching the birds, looking at the swampy waters with masses of mauve flowering Cape Waterlilies waving in the breeze, and Purple Swamphens stepping from one lily pad to the next avoiding the ducks that swam between them. I arrived at Port Macquarie and found a cabin that overlooked a break wall to a natural inlet – from my balcony I could see a small pod of dolphins in the inlet.

By now I had been travelling for 2 weeks and leaving Port, as it is known locally, made my way along a short stretch of the Waterfall Way to Dorrigo. I managed to find a rustic cabin in a tourist park that resembled an old frontier town. The cabin had seen better days but it was clean and cosy and, more importantly, close to the Dorrigo National Park. In this rainforest area a short, elevated boardwalk passes through the rainforest canopy. This then descends onto a track, which in turn led to other tracks. Over the days I was there, I walked up and down and wound through the rainforest to waterfalls. It was fascinating with the variety of plants and trees. One to avoid was the Stinging Nettle Tree with its big stinging leaves and vicious looking spines on its stems.

Close to Dorrigo are the Danger Falls. I descended on a steep, narrow walking track and was lucky to spot three Tawny Frogmouths, an adult and two chicks. Typically, the adult was stock still and blended well with the tree but the chicks were a bit restless and sat on a branch looking gormless, as only a frogmouth can do – it was their movement that drew my attention. The Falls plunged into a pool suitable for swimming but the water was too cold for me.....



Tawny Frogmouths



Crimson Rosella &  
Regent Bowerbird

.....Leaving New South Wales and entering Queensland, I climbed on a tortuous road that took me to O'Reilley's Retreat in the Lamington National Park. The Retreat is a cluster of mainly wooden buildings snugly set in the rainforest – my modest room, slightly tired looking, but wonderfully located looks south and west across the mountains. I enjoyed beautiful sunsets, watched the clouds scud by, was visited by King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas and loved every minute of my time there. I walked and walked, visited various waterfalls and saw many birds. The one that eluded me was the Albert's Lyrebird, found nowhere else in the world but here. Others had recorded sightings so I went to those locations, but nothing. I was rewarded with birds that were new to me: Logrunner, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Brown Cuckoo Dove, Satin & Regent Bower Birds – to name a few. I walked the lengthy, swaying Tree Top Walk several times, morning and evening. Visited the Mountain Gardens that were full of flowering shrubs and one morning walked to Moran Falls. It was a 6kms circuit and I only saw 3 people. At the Falls lookout, I sat on a rock to eat my



lunch and when I got up the most beautiful yellow-marked lizard was spread across the width of the path. He wasn't worried by me so I gently stepped over him and started my ascent back to the Retreat. On another walk I passed a Brush Box Tree that is said to be 1500 years old. Geology-wise I have entered a different age altogether – no wonder they call this the Gondwana Forest.

King Parrot



Brown Cuckoo Dove

It was down to the coast from there for a few days, and then home. My records show that I sighted 76 species of birds as well as a wide variety of butterflies, insects, mammals, reptiles (water dragons), bats etc.

A wonderful trip.

**Diane Caulkett**