

FRASER ISLAND REGENERATION TRIP

7th to 15th May 2008

Wednesday 7th May

Over toast and tea, six of us, Jon, Tanya, Bill S, Shirley, Bill Mc and Toska, introduced themselves as the next group of volunteer bush regenerators. From here we joined a full bus of tourists to meet the ferry at River Heads. The day was glorious – hot and sunny, calm seas and the occasional dolphin.

On land we were in the hands of the bus driver, Hayden. We stopped at Central Station to walk the boardwalk and learn about the history of the logging settlement. On the bus we were brought up to date with the geomorphological history of this great sandy island, its comparison with the Sahara Desert and the life cycle of the scribbly gum moth.

At Eurong Stephanie and Julian welcomed us and showed us to our resort rooms. After dumping our belongings, we headed back to the main base to be welcomed by chef Su and her wonderful morning tea. Over cups of coffee, chocolate cookies and without as much as a minute's work, Stephanie distributed each couple with two books on Fraser Island and explained the daily routine. A deliciously healthy lunch of spring and nori rolls, salad and fruit soon followed. Little wonder some had to rest from all those delectable eats.

We regrouped at 2.00p.m. to meet Jason Harvey, recently appointed Weeds Project Officer for Fraser Island. He will work with us until Saturday and like the rest of us is keen to learn the weeds specific to this area. To this end we set off for an identification stroll and demonstration of weeds and their methods of removal.

To someone who assisted last year the return to areas cleared last year brought several surprises. The most rewarding was the reduction in weeds despite a year of good precipitation. Unfortunately, one weed, Siratro, rarely encountered last year, had found it an excellent year to reproduce over large areas especially in the more difficult clearing areas of the resort rubbish dumps. Another weed, even worst for its sticky seeds, Mossman River Grass, likewise had spread further a field, even to some residential lawns.

Of lesser joy is the new large dingo fence which surrounds the resort. Indiscriminate bulldozing has made several areas less easy to clean now the roots of such things as Corky Passionfruit and Coastal Morning Glory has been covered. The wide exposed strips will provide excellent sites to study plant succession (possibly more weeds) over months to come. Where last year we struggled through dense growth, this year the fence provides an easy walking path.

In Second Valley strong stands of Brazilian Cherry still cover the area, intermingled with several exotic grasses such as Green Panic grass. While the Mother of Millions still lurk they are nowhere as prevalent as last year. Several new residential blocks have appeared and are selling between \$125- 160,000. Otherwise Second Valley is still the same quiet spot of disused cars, caravans and a single dingo who has outwitted the new fence.

Su provided a welcome dinner of a wonderful fish curry, rice and salad. In honour of a dear friend and fellow conservationist, George, who sadly passed away earlier this year, we dine on his favourite dessert, a rich chocolate cake. Unfortunately for Julian, he will once again have to become the driver of the Troopie, a task George was to have done this time.

Thursday 8th May 2008

After an early night we rose to the sound of Rainbow Lorikeets – this ensured there were no late comers to a wonderful breakfast of cereals, toast, paw paw and mandarin juice provided by Tosca and squeezed by Julian.

Everybody was ready to go after Julian gave out the gloves and tools required to do our work. The tools consisted of fold up saw, secateurs and knife. Jason who was coordinating all the relevant organizations to assist with the Fraser Island environmental rehabilitation work.

Julian, Steph and Tosca were happy to see the work done on the previous visit (12 months ago) was successful with only minimal weeding required this visit. Last years previous work provided encouragement to the novices.

Then it was all hands pulling, cutting, and poisoning Stinking Passionfruit Vine, Cassia, Fish Bone Fern, Lantana and many others.

All tools were gathered at 11am and we returned to Talinga for morning tea with more of the delicious chocolate cake. A quick refresh and it was back for lunch - a healthy cold collation.

At 1.15 pm it was all aboard the Troopie with Julian as our competent driver and off we went! It was a 40-minute drive along the beach to view the remains of the SS Maheno.

Natural erosion over the last 70 years had worn this magnificent ship to mere rusty remains. An amazing reminder of the power of sand, waves and time can do to this NZ liner. It was on its final journey to the wrecking yards in Japan after being built 30 years' prior in Scotland. The journey to Japan was never completed after rough weather broke the towing lines. – Its final resting place was on the west coast of Fraser Island.

On our return we stopped off at Eli Creek for a wade in pristine waters – tourist of all nationalities were having a great time.

The final stop upon our return was at Happy Valley - Steph and Julian gave us a run down on the progress being made on the rehab. work. Upon leaving we could see work required with so many Cassias flowering,

An enjoyable meal of lasagne accompanied the stimulating conversation about everyone's travel tales. It was then time to return to our respective beds for a good night's sleep ready to tackle the Eurong vegetation again.

Friday 9th May

Breakfast at 7 sharp: delicious custard apples grown by Tosca and Bill, de-seeded by Stephanie and Su. We are at the washing-up sink when dancing-girl's nephew/orator/airman (Bill McLeod) emerges from the pandanus in his city clothes. Jubilation! Our group is complete.

No time for celebrations – it's on with the pouches, hats, and gloves and off to work. Lots of bending and knife-ing as we tidy-up yesterday's efforts and tackle our new tasks under Stephanie's direction. Grubbing out more Philodendron, Altanethra, Fishbone Fern, Stinking Passionfruit Vine, etc. as the alpha males (Julian and Jason) go off to spray their pink poison on the big stuff. Sirato, Baleria and juvenile Cassias collapse under their fire.

Morning tea brings relief, but have we really earned it? Another delicious lunch follows almost immediately (thank you again Su and Stephanie) and soon we are springing into the 4 wheel drive



and whizzing out along the sand to Hammerstone Blow.

Here the group divides: Julian, the Bills (Scholtz and Mcleod), Shirley, Toska, Jon and Tanya walk through open forest surrounded by burrawangs and melalueca and then up over the rolling sand dunes while Stephanie, Jason and Su do their botanical treasure hunt along the easy (?) route.

As the main group reaches the last sandy summit, Lake Wabby is revealed below – an unexpected translucent green - fringed by

reeds on one side and terraces of backpackers on the other. Clambering down the steep descent, we exchange our clothes for bathers and plunge into the lake. The cool water is a welcome reward for our toil. It's lovely. A Brahminy kite swoops out of the trees and glides along the far edge of the lake searching for food; swallows flit across the surface of the water. A pair of cat fish swim by.

The return journey is an up and down sandy track through forest, past scribbly gums bleeding their gum in dark streaks, native orchids and grass trees amongst the banksias. We are over-taken by back- packers and the sounds of youth: thundering footsteps and excited voices in many languages. Once again in Julian's safe hands we drive back to Eurong for a short respite before dinner - another tour de force with elegant ginger and honey pears as the grand finale.

Then off to the luxury accommodation



Saturday 10th May

We set off this morning in high spirits, and HI HO line, to Second Valley behind the resort. We trekked over sand hills to the settlement and our first impression was panic –Green Panic Grass - Jon had obviously handled this problem before and quickly set about the removal of the small patch that had survived previous eradication attempts.

Stephanie, during our break, explained the characteristics of disturbed canopy, illustrating the lack of juvenile trees of similar species to the mature canopy. The disturbed state became quite obvious when Tanya gave a cry of alarm as she was attacked by ants, while Bill and Bill became confused as to who was required to jump when that name was called. Anthony Bill, rather than being further

confused by plant identification, settled down with a densely populated area of Mother of Millions and achieved a state of quiet meditation.

The rest of the group under Stephanie's watchful eye progressed slowly forward in an orderly line removing Corky Passionfruit, Madeira vine, Blady grass, Siratro and Asparagus fern.

This area had been cleared the previous year and the number of weeds on this occasion was only a small fraction of what had been there before. The Madeira vine in particular, had only a few sparse remnants of what had been there previously. The remaining Corky Passionfruit was weak and easily removed. Very few mature Mother of Millions remained, however there were significant numbers of seedlings.

Julian and Jason arranged to meet behind the toilet block to deal with some very nasty business. A previous excursion into this area had revealed an extensive stand of Mossman River grass and Siratro. The stand was so extensive that spot spraying was not possible and the whole area had to be treated to effect some level of control.

After lunch, having said our farewells to Jason, the group set off in the troopie to the look-out above Lake Wabby. We looked down onto the beautiful green lake to see two lone souls below, whereas the previous day, our day, the backpackers were shoulder to shoulder, jostling for space to make noise.

We then set off to Kingfisher Resort along a slow, soft track. The distance was short but the time long as a bogged vehicle slowed our progress. After stopping to assist we found ourselves in a similar predicament. Under the able directions of Su and strength of the others, Julian's superb driving skills came to the fore and we were once again on our way.

Eventually we arrived at the resort for a late afternoon drink, a slow cup of coffee. Most were impressed with the way the resort fitted into the landscape and the philosophy of efficient harvesting of tourist dollars in an ecologically friendly manner.

In darkness we slowly made our way home. Everyone was weary and a bit stiff after the long day in the vehicle. However, with a few stiff drinks and the evening BBQ the conversation again livened. The pros and cons of resort development were debated and the Lymburners regaled us with their early experiences as financially challenged and fearless adventurers.

Sunday 11th May 2008

Being a day of rest, we enjoyed a leisurely breakfast of bacon and eggs at 7.30am. Sunday, was going to be a "bird day" with even a swallow greeting us – the nest resting on the exit sign of our accommodation.

The weather looked threatening all during the day, but never caused any problems to our activities – a perfect rainbow formed as Julian commenced his drive in the Troopie, along the beach to the Pinnacles where we viewed beautiful colour sand patterns that rose up to form pinnacles.

Then it was on to Dundubara where 2 dingoes, Crested Terns, Plovers, White faced Herons, Pied Oyster Catchers (Wong birds) were sighted. As we drove into Dundubara Common bronzwing, Eastern Shrike Thrush, Spangled Drongo, Noisy Friar Bird, Pee wee, and a Crow were observed.

Bill McLeod gave us a lecture on the Golden orb spider. The female was a large spider about 7 cm long and the male about ½ cm long – this all seemed out of character with the scheme of things and the mating that took place all seemed a little incongruous. The female was happily rolling up flies in

its web while the little male was trying to procreate.

Then after Tanya's fine cake for morning tea, it was on to Indian Head. A short sharp climb up to the lookout to see schools of fish and a turtle – the rough seas made it difficult viewing. This location was near Waddy Point where a boy was killed by a dingo on the beach some years ago.

We headed south along the beach for a while and then inland to Lake Allom for lunch. The drive into the picnic area was stunning – spectacular trees (Kauri, Satinay, and Hoop pine) dominated the landscape. Strangler figs were everywhere.

The lunch prepared by Su and Steph was 1st Class. An Eastern Yellow Robin entertained us by darting around the table and it finished with a mate arriving on the scene to help with the crumbs under the table.

The walk around the lake was enjoyable, seeing Cycads and the bush close up. In the lake were Fresh water turtles that swam over and looked up at you – they slowly dispersed when they realized there was no food offered.

The bumpy return trip seemed quicker than the initial trip into the area. We stopped at a lookout that gave a wonderful view of some sand dunes in the distance and then continued onto the beach. Returning to Eurong we sighted a Brahminy Kite and a Sea eagle.

Su and Steph once again treated us to an enjoyable meal – spaghetti bolognese. Then there were some funny, /interesting, and amazing stories that left you totally entertained. The main story tellers were Julian about life on a house boat and Jon with a compilation of never ending sagas!

Monday 12th May

The sun is slothful - still wrapped in golden eiderdown clouds at 6:30, rubbing its eyes and deciding whether to rise and shine. Brown baked beans with Geller forks break our fast. Soon Julian and the McLeods are off to a secret location doing unmentionable things to unknown weeds. Meanwhile, we (Stephanie, Su, Shirley, Bill Scholtz, Tanya and Jon) are in Second Valley getting down, dirty and damp amongst the Mother of Trillions, Maderia Vines, Fish Bone Ferns and Corky Passion Fruit. The trees rip the bottom out of the low flying clouds and torrents pour down our necks and into our socks. Two dingoes sniffing at our bags try to shelter in our drenched shadows. Stephanie calls a halt but her words are washed away in the deluge. Sign language with secateurs and knives stops work.

The six bedraggled weeders drip back to their rooms at 9:15 for hot showers, dry clothes and beds still warm from the previous night's sleep. Clothes and shoes dry under whirring fans. Mud is removed in laundry washers. Lunch at 12:30 and afterwards a quick consensus to weed the blue afternoon to make amends for the sodden morning. The same old fare to search for and grapple with; just when you think an area is cleared, a new invasion is detected. (Must try without the trifocals – they multiply the weeds.) As their homes are destroyed, Bronze Bum ants bite – just as vicious as ever. Two hours of afternoon weeding and our penance is over.

Darkness pads down at 5:30 and puts the sun to sleep. Wine and food (a Su Super Asian Special and the Seduction of Stephanie's Spicy Apple Crumble) is accompanied by reminiscences of first loves and meetings. Relationships that are more stable than the weeds – Evergreens!

Tuesday 13th May

Despite the few downpours during the evening, the day welcomes us with blue sky and dry clothes on the line.

After breakfast, the wise set out with raincoats, the optimistic without, returning to the area where we had been drenched the previous day. At the site a dingo eyes us carefully in the hope our backpacks contain goodies but all it receives is the chance of being a close-up photo shot for Bill.



The plan is to finish the site by mid morning break and then move elsewhere. For most of us this means pulling corky passion fruit while Bill continues on in his specialty, the beloved 'fish ferns', 'bone ferns' or fishbone ferns. Along the pathway, we are alerted to yet another small but significant patch of Mossman River Grass as its tenacious seed heads grasp our clothes. This terror seems to be making inroads all over the resort area and unless controlled soon will make walking around this area a bushwalkers, let alone regenerator's nightmare.

After the break, we start a penguin parade into the area between the path and the dingo fence.

Here, on the previous day, by lopping the sprawling arms of the lantana, several of us had attempted to halt its progress in re-striking. Seed heads indicate the recent flowering of several patches of Swamp Orchids (*Geodorum sp.*) Stephanie's loud 'NO' breaks the silence as Bill tries to confirm a Hibbertia as friend or foe. Other weeds include Stinking Passion Fruit and Cassia. Suddenly our exploration of this area is halted by the dumping of rain and we quickly take shelter. Another day cut short by the weather.

While most of head back to the resort, Bill, Stephanie and Julian wander past one of the earlier patches we had cleaned within the resort grounds. Much to their dismay, the large Banksia tree and Crinum lilies, so carefully left, are being removed. There needs to be better communication between the gardener and regeneration group if enthusiasm is to be maintained.

After morning tea, we set off in the troopie to Lake McKenzie. The rain has changed the nature of the road to a firmer consistency, bumpy but no chance of bogging. Many stories and 17 kilometers later we arrived at the lake. The lake is suspended high in the dunes, surrounded by beautiful white sand.

The edge drops quickly into clear deep water. The lake is one of the most popular destinations on the island and as such is littered with a polyglot lot of odd bods and sods from all over the planet. Despite the overcast conditions, the lake still held its colourful magic.

Su and Stephanie prepared a superb picnic lunch of corned beef, avocado, salad and condiments. We all consumed far too much and sat back, satiated, while Bronze Wing pigeons commented on our reluctance to share food with them. After lunch Stephanie and Julian swam to the far side of the lake. Unlike last year the numerous small turtles did not seem to be around. Jon, Tanya and Bill has a somewhat shorter dip, while Bill Mc, Shirley and the fearless Su protected our gear from marauding animals.

Siratro was starting to become established in the picnic area. Nearby a stand of young trees had been weighed down by these vines. At this stage control of this problem would be relatively easy.

Impressed by the barista's ability to create Fraser Island fish designs, as discovered by Bill on the

previous day, four of us headed down for a pre-dinner coffee. This was followed by a Persian dinner theme – Persian feta and chicken, couscous, beans and fruit salad. The intimacies of early courtship days and the formalities of Japanese relationships, as explained by Su, filled the round table conversations.

Wednesday 14th May

Breakfast consisted of a good selection - baked beans, fruit and cereals. On previous breakfasts, we have heard of this monster disturbing the sleep of Steph, Julian and Su at the main house – it turned out to be a lovely marsupial the size of a mouse. It was called a Melomys that measures about 7 cm body and a 7 cm tail. This animal had a furry tail with a fluffy end –most unlike a rat that has a furless tail. Steph tried to draw this delightful creature but unfortunately it looked more like a cute cat. To make her happy we all nodded.

Work commenced a short distance from Steph, Su and Julian's house (Talinga). It was a brand new experience – Climbing Brazilian Nightshade!! It was growing all over native trees. The task was to cut off the red berries and bag them to prevent spreading. It was amazing how this aggressive weed took hold of the area.

We felt as if we had earned our stripes when we were allowed out into real bush – past the dingo fence!! As we proceeded outside the confines of the Eurong Resort the Asparagus fern, Cassia and

Lantana started to appear. Having never seen such a proliferation of Lantana, the excitement was palpable as we launched ourselves into the task of elimination. Being on the side of a hill was no obstacle for the determined FIDO team. We hacked, cut and poisoned our way up that Lantana hill. There were too many people to mention in dispatches back to FIDO HQ.



After morning coffee, we headed off for 40-minute drive in the Troopie to Lake Birrabeen. The lake was absolutely beautiful – a perfect place for lunch where once again Su and Steph excelled themselves. Most had a swim – Shirley for the first time on Fraser Island. The drive back through the rainforest was delightful.

During the evening meal - a delicious chorizo and butter bean stew – followed by another fruit salad 2 dingoes came up to see what was happening and soon disappeared after being ignored. The finale to a wonderful day!

Thursday 15th May

After a night of heavy rain and stolen shoes, the dingoes are hoping to be rewarded for their patience

- waiting to pounce on any scraps that might fall from our breakfast table. We commiserate with their lean and hungry vigil. But they're out of luck. Again.

Off to Lantana Hill armed with all our heavy arsenal. We assemble ready for the kill: "fighting for truth, justice and the Australian way of life" (in the words of Bill Scholtz). Rooting out lantana with tentacles six metres long spreading into trees and over the steep hillside, we slip and slide in the sand, using our poison pot spikes as crampons. Meanwhile down by the road others are engaged in

a similar battle, but without the vertigo. Huge stands of lantana are obliterated with jungle saws and heavy doses of round up. The pretty red and green berries of the Climbing Brazilian Nightshade meet a similar fate.

Just as we are leaving, clouds open with copious tears. Are they weeping in appreciation of our efforts? A wet and bedraggled little group returns to morning tea with two Council workers.

We shower and change and lunch is ready: – (we’ve become too accustomed to these banquets). Afterwards we are transported up the beach by Julian, following the tracks along the sand to Happy Valley where a tiny plane waits to take us for a “joy” flight over the island.

Joy or Terror? Swooping up the coast along the aqua band between the beach and deep water, sharks, sting and manta rays are seen by some. Others are not so lucky. The long vista to the north gives some idea of the island’s extent. Turning west, large areas of forest, valleys of palm trees and swathes of sands give some idea of the vegetation and dune system. We fly over Coomboo Lakes (one heart shaped) and to Deepwater and Freshwater Lakes (one butterfly shaped. “Butterfly” is the only audible word in the pilot’s commentary – the rest is lost in the plane’s noisy engine. Finally, we pass over Allom Lake where the turtles live and back along the coast above the Pinnacles, coloured sands and wreck of the Maheno. Quick visit to National Parks office for postcards and we are back at Eurong by 4 pm.

The grand finale is another sumptuous meal prepared by Su and Stephanie, a toast to everyone’s magnificent efforts and some last minute tales of previous adventures. What a group and what leaders! Thank you Stephanie, Julian and Su. It was a privilege to be part of this group.



Weeds dealt with on the trip:

Common name

Lantana
Madeira Vine
Easter Cassia
Stinking Passionfruit
Corky Passionfruit
Fishbone Fern
Climbing Brazilian Nightshade
Siratro
Mother of Millions
Mother of Millions
Umbrella Tree
Mossman River Grass
Green Panic Grass
Painted Spurge
Coastal Morning Glory

Botanical name

Lantana camara
Anredera cordifolia
Senna pendula var. *glabrata*
Passiflora foetida
Passiflora suberosa
Nephrolepis cordifolia
Solanum seaforthianum
Macroptilium atropurpureum
Bryophyllum delagoense
Bryophyllum pinnatum
Schefflera actinophylla
Cenchrus echinatus
Panicum maximum
Euphorbia cyathophora
Ipomoea cairica

Julian, Stephanie and Su would like to thank all the participants for their unflagging good humour and enthusiasm – making the trip for us a thoroughly enjoyable experience – and, we got a lot of work done too.



Drawings by Jon Crothers.
Photos by various team members.