

**TODAY'S TREASURES
TOMORROW'S GIFT**

Mavis Clements

The island excites with contrasts.
Breath-taking views from higher altitudes,
Eerie shadowy spaces beneath dense canopies,
Ancient and complex interweavings of Banyans,
A softened atmosphere of curved lines,
Pandanus forest in stark contrast
Teepee tent root systems of diagonal lines and acute angles
Create a mood of mayhem and tension.
The soft secret world of ferns and fungi
Gentle delights, delicate treasures to behold.

Wind – swept clifftops
Exposed to roaring wind and driving rain,
Sculpturing and shaping vegetation
Into gnarled, bent shapes.
Homes and lodges lying low in sheltered valleys,
Protected and sheltered within their greenery,
Quiet havens, hidden and safe.

Imposing mountains captivating intrepid walkers,
Shaped by titanic inner forces,
Lagoon hiding marine wonders,
Exotic colours and patterns of corals,
Fish, swift darting or elegantly fluttering,
Irresistible interaction for snorkellers
In this cool, opalescent world.

Seabirds wheeling and calling around clifftops and islets,
Colour outstanding against indigo seas,
Graceful aerial balletic flight, poetry in motion.
Landbirds, unafraid of humans,
Ground dwellers, quiet scavengers,
Muted gentle shades, jewels of the forests.

Magical cameos of Nature's island riches,
Appreciated and enjoyed with intensity and enthusiasm.
Honoured through writing and photography,
Thoughtfully cared for and managed,
Tomorrow's gift,
Our children's heritage.

**Day 1
Wednesday, 1 May
Sydney to Lord Howe Island**

We assembled at Eastern Australia Airlines lounge (being not labelled it took time and difficulty to locate. John Sinclair had taxi problems and was a little later to arrive but we all got airborne to time.

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 2

An easy flight and soon Balls Pyramid (how forbid ding to seafarers) appeared on the starboard side. We goggled at the rocky cliffs as we half circled the island and looked at the pretty beaches and waving palms.

In no time we were at Ocean View Lodge after a quick tour of nearby features, John stopped to point out Mt Lidgbird and Mt Gower and the prospects of climbing the latter by the fittest of us. After moving in to our commodious units at Ocean View Lodge we spent the afternoon our own ways. Some swam, some hoped the man fishing on the jetty had a catch – No! But we saw the largest of black stingrays vacuum cleaning the sandy bottom.

Power generator problems left us with torchlight for happy hour and on into dinner time at Beachcomber. This was no deterrent to our enjoying an excellent dinner. Most of the group walked home safely as there were no drains to swallow them up.

Day 2 Thursday, 2 May Malabar & Northern Hills

Our first full day on Lord Howe Island was full of promise. The day dawning fine and sunny, a light breeze, water temperature of 22 degrees and 17 eager Go Bush safarists ready to go.

It seemed like a good day to go snorkelling in the glass bottomed boat. After breakfast on John's verandah – a fine selection including sultana porridge – we headed for the “Coral Empress” After carefully washing our feet to “sand free” we boarded and headed for Erscotts Hole and snorkelling for most. A wondrous world of underwater marine life unfolded to us. Well worth the effort for the assorted bodies that floated on the surface.

Dean, our captain, also fed the local fish “a la natural “with a sea urchin he dangled from a string under the boat. We learnt about neighbour fish or stinkies- the fish you give your neighbours because of the iodine taste and smell, the endemic anemone fish – black with white tail, the Stripies with horizontal and vertical stripes, the double headed Wrasse and the oh-so-colourful parrot fish. A great 2 hour experience on the Prince William Henry Bay of Lord Howe Island

Then it rained but it cleared about an hour later and all was well for the afternoon's excursion

After lunch we commenced the 3.5 km, 3-hour walk up to Malabar and Kims Lookout (a grade 5 walk). It was steep and sometimes painful but we were all happy with our first bush walk on the island. The scenery was breathtaking from so high. The red tailed tropicbirds put on a wonderful display for us all and we managed to see one chick still at its nest

A special moment saw us all peering at a very dainty orchid in flower — *Corybas barbarae* (helmet orchid) — endemic to the island and only found in this 5 square metre area amongst the sedge grasses (Many thanks to our FL for knowing the exact spot)

John also provided a hot cup of tea and biscuits at Kims Lookout which was much appreciated. He also pointed out the very rare Lord Howe Island llama on the track far below and nearly out of sight!!!!.

For the birdos we saw white terns and chick, red tailed frigate birds and chick, male and female golden whistlers, emerald winged pigeon, masked booby, nankeen kestrel, sacred kingfisher, blackbirds, welcome swallows, white faced heron and cormorants.

5.30 saw us all at the happy hour before having dinner at the Wolf and Twiggs. We had all had a very rewarding first full day on the island.

Day 3 Friday, 3 May Valley of Shadows & Clear Place

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 3

The weather dictated a change of plan, and the afternoon became the morning, so we headed off for a walk instead of the proposed boat trip.

Soon we were up the hill and off the bitumen onto palm-lined pathways and evidence of mutton-bird burrows off to each side, but little evidence of recent habitation. Had the birds already left on their annual migration, or is the population shrinking?

A gentle breeze created a constant rustling in the palms. Only dappled light filtered through the thick vegetation. Golden whistlers and golden orb spiders were prevalent. Along the way we crossed a deep ravine caused by a 40 inch downfall of rain over 24 hours some years ago. Happily it was revegetating from the natural seed source.

After a very steep descent to Middle Beach we were entertained to a spectacular aerial display from a Blackwinged Storm Petrel. The wave-sculpted calcarite formation on the beach is sand cemented by limestone.

Later a lone Nankeen Kestrel hovered at close range, at the Clear Place. What jouissance! The seascape was superb, with Mutton Bird Island in the foreground, and the apex of Balls Pyramid surrealistically in view behind Mt Lidgbird.

Again there was that familiar Lord Howe Island sound of gently rustling palms as we entered the Valley of Shadows. There the Banyan giants, immense in size, impressed us with their interweaving and interconnected branches and subsidiaries.

The afternoon's program was "do it yourself", so the choice was diverse, some even choosing horizontal therapy! Snorkelling and swimming were also a popular choice. One lanky lad with hollow legs resorted to the ministrations of the local medico and two litres of special Island fluid to restore his state of equilibrium.

Day 4 Saturday, 4 May Goat House, Boat Harbour, etc.

This was to be the day to sort out who were serious about attempting Mt Gower on Monday. The objective was to have a long all-day walk to the Boat harbour and for those who were seriously considering attempting Mt Gower, to make a diversion to the Goat-House. But like the great plans of mice and men ...

It started right with a flurry of activity in Unit 1 with everyone making sandwiches and packing lunch. The first vehicle was to contain those aiming to attempt the Goat House and the others to wait on Smoking Tree Ridge for F.L. and others in the second vehicle to go on to the Boat Harbour.

Alas everyone in the first vehicle and some in the second vehicle headed for the Goat House leaving only F.L. and three others to take the direct route to the Boat Harbour from where they could see the final ascent of the mountaineers. Fearless Leader Frantically waved but when he was ignored, he wandered off and found a bench and went to sleep.

Meanwhile those on the side of Mt Lidgbird, oblivious of their supposed rendezvous below lapped up the sunshine, the sight of the tropic-bird in such close proximity, and the spectacular views. They dawdled, ate lunch and spent time before retracing their steps down the way from whence they had come (but not the way they were expected to go).

Four though, Michael, John, Rowena and Angela followed the plan and went to the Boat Harbour encountering F.L. Peter, Betty and Margaret as they were preparing to take off for Muttonbird Point. So the latter took off while the Goat Housers went to enjoy a well-deserved swim in the sparkling waters of the Boat Harbour but oblivious of the amazing bounce of the stones which comprised the rocky beach.

In the meantime Kevin was combing long grass at the golf course for lost golf balls while waiting for the rendezvous. He found about 25 as well some of the misdirected walkers. He soon rounded up most and headed back to Ocean View. Eventually all caught up and all were elated with their respective achievements

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 4

for the day except for poor old F.L. whose plans had gone astray and Bill who spent the day horizontally and still weak from what transpired to be a virus.

Two Other Perspectives on Day 4 Goat House Cave — Boat Harbour

1. Michael Haarhoff

The walk on the 4th day was to Boat Harbour, with a side trip to the Goat House for those with grit. We started from the end of Lagoon Road crossing a paddock and a creek, then into forest canopy. Here there are scaly barks with buttresses, cedar, pandanus and elkhorn ferns. Up at the top of Smoking Tree Ridge, the path forks, the track climbs, red markers show the way, forest is denser, ropes aid the climb to where the summit is in sight. Dark grey rocks harbour low scrub and some endemic trees. Huffing and puffing we are finally rewarded with splendid views over the north of Lord Howe Island including the lagoon and airstrip. Under an overhang a red-tailed tropic-bird was sitting on an egg. Around the corner, a good view of Ball's Pyramid. Rowena "called" Providence petrels. An ebullient mood pervaded the Party. All agreed that the walk was the highlight of the safari.

Our hearts felt like alligators. Legs were like pistons!

After the decent we met F.L. waiting for the main party. Enid had apparently gone A.W.O.L.

The beach at Boat Harbour consisted of bouncing rocks, some almost spherical, lying amongst worn coral. There are two freshwater creeks. John and Rowena took a plunge into the briny.

F.L. was left waiting, the main party having absconded, luckily being met by Kevin who was collecting golf balls nearby. The remainder returned via Muttonbird Point to rendezvous at the appointed location next to the airport.

2. Enid Haarhoff

Weather perfect. The good news is that Bill is recovering. ... Boat trip?? Never mind, perhaps next week? So off we go to Goat House Cave and Boat Harbour.... Sallie and Greg chose Little Island to find woodhens. ... Some aspirants are in training for Mt. Gower on Monday.

Kevin dropped us off at Intermediate Hill track where we were greeted by a flock of Lord Howe Island pied currawongs. Soon we were walking through dry rainforest, greybarks, sallywoods and blackbutts, up and up, over the roots. A stick was a help.

A brief rest by some logs where the tracks meet. Now the vegetation changes as the track continues up, along Smoking Tree Ridge.

A canopy of palms, cool, green, so peaceful.

A time for being in the natural world.

- whispering rustling leaves
- a gentle breeze
- tiny white flower, small shiny red berries
- the call of a bird
- a red blaze to point the way
- a palm trunk to lean on, look up, a glimpse of blue
- a pink beribboned palm
- on and up, roots all the way, fern now rocks
- and a glimpse of Mt Lidgbird, Mt. Gower ...

This old babbler not lost, just wondering, just wondering where there are? Trudging along in gentle rain, being thoroughly stirred at by numerous bulls (not intimidated) Electric fences a deterrent to shortcuts. Not a soul to be seen playing on the verdant golf course. Spurwing plovers, ducks, mudlarks about and welcome swallows.

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 5

Lovely Cobby's Corner. Here some welcome shade, a chance to paddle and enjoy the views, then onwards to deserted airport, clouds gathering, still wondering where are they? All along the road kingfishers perching on fences, so beautiful ... Then — oh bliss a welcome lift indeed, cheerful, happy caring friends to be with once again.

Another delectable meal at beachcomber restaurant; some folk discover rum balls — yum.

Day 5 Sunday, 5 May Boat Cruise & Transit Hill

*The early morning air was still
And calm the glassy sea,
Though threatening clouds hung overhead
Our spirits they were free,
For the much awaited island cruise
Thrice scheduled, IS on today.
So with cameras slung around our necks
We would soon be on our way.*

Yes, the early sunrise seeker had already optimistically laid the plans for today by the time others joined him around the breakfast table. "The water is as smooth as a millpond," Tony reassured us. When John S announced the cruise was a goer there were resounding cheers, and the porridge was eaten ever more lustily than ever.

As we assembled by the jetty soon after 9am, a light sprinkle of rain cause a momentary flicker of doubt that perhaps we wouldn't go after all, but the rain quickly subsided and the optimism and expectation returned. Kingfishers entertained us as they flitted and flew along the rock platform beside the jetty. We watched M.V. B. Centauri glide smoothly towards, and nose alongside, the jetty. We scrambled aboard like chattering excited children and soon we were off, skippered by John and supported by Keith, two of the Wilson's.

The boat motored out across the lagoon through very smooth waters, passing North Bay underneath the Whale, and through the North Passage out into the open sea. Although there was some swell it was much calmer than it might have been. The cruise went round the island in an anti-clockwise direction, first across the front of The Lagoon before heading along the front of the escarpments of Mts. Lidgbird and Gower.

We were impressed by a single Black Noddy flying faster than our 9 knots. We marvelled at the height and steepness of the land and the rock textures of the cliffs as our boat took us past Erskine Valley, the Saddle and the land up onto Mt. Gower. As John W, Michael and Tony would be tackling this tomorrow we were all rather interested.

A flight of Common Noddies took off from their cliff face nests and soared overhead and many beautiful Red-Tailed Tropicbirds were also evident. The lower slopes contained many palms and John S told us stories of how the boys collect the seeds from these isolated spots. Providence Petrels were also high in the sky above us as we approached the southern end of the island.

The colour of the sea here was a deep inky blue as we started to turn around the southern end of the island. We saw a colony of White Terns on Gower Island and Masked Boobies was caught, we hope, in several camera lenses. At this point we glimpsed Ball's Pyramid rising out of the sea to the south-east. Taking photos of this rock spire proved difficult, as the boat dipped through the swell, and was the undoing of Tony who started to take an interest in the maritime life!

The towering slopes of Gower and Lidgbird still gripped our attention and the changing colours and textures of the rock faces along the water's edge continued to fascinate us. At Red Point under Lidgbird a rock layer of

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 6

deep red provided a contrast with the surrounding black and grey rocks. In amongst the various little promontories along the coast were tiny pebble beach strips formed by the action of the waves.

We rounded East Point and into the quieter waters of Boat Harbour. Mt Lidgbird reared above the boulder beach of Boat Harbour and we could clearly see Goat House Cave where the group had been the day before. Sadly the writers of this entry hadn't. The particular view we had of the mountain emphasized the extreme steepness of the cliffs above the Goat House. The waters of this stretch were a lighter brighter turquoise.

The grassy top of the next promontory, Mutton Bird Point, was dotted with the white bodies of the Masked Booby colony. As we came round this point the colour of the sea was even more vivid as clouds gave way to more sun. This was Blinkenthorpe Bay and Blinky Beach and the stands of Norfolk Pines provided a backdrop to our view. The landmark Windsock also indicated the presence of the airport.

Now in quieter waters, there were many seabirds swooping and diving around the boat. But they proved elusive to our cameras. We were greeted by people at The Clear Place after their walk through the forest and on rounding the next point there was Middle Beach and, not much beyond there, Ned's Beach.

In front of us then loomed the ridge of the Malabar Walk with Malabar Hill at the northern point. John S pointed the different greens in the grass below the forest at the start of the walk and wondered whether different springs were causing the variations.

Out beyond Malabar Hill our skipper took the Centauri out to the Admiralty Islands going between Noddy Island and Roach Island up to the view of the hole in the wall (a wave-cut tunnel) on Roach Island. He idled the boat for 3-4 minutes for photos and our appreciation of the rock formations on the island.

Then, we were off on a westerly tack across the north edge of Lord High Island. We knew this area well from the track at the top of the cliff running from Malabar Hill to Kim's Lookout. We had a new appreciation of the height of the cliffs and the rock formations from below - dykes and sills in the basaltic rock layers and caves formed in the rocks at the water's edge. The red-tailed tropicbirds wheeled overhead, in and out of the nesting holes, and the waves crashed against the rocks.

The cliffs continued beyond Kim's and at the edge of the water the Herring Pools, a layer of rock above the waves at low tide, appeared at the eastern edge of the entrance to Old Gulch. Old Gulch was a narrow inlet with what appeared to be a rocky beach at the southern end. The waves surged in and out of the Old Gulch creating a most impressive and powerful force. Mt Eliza appeared above us with another display of dykes and sills in the rocky cliffs.

We rounded the promontory and headed south much to Tony's relief as his uncomfortable situation continued. South to North Head around the Whale was more of the same - cliffs, caves, and birds. We moved into the North Passage and turned to go into The Lagoon. The water became smoother immediately but this did not stop Glen from starting to suffer from faintness and nausea, although probably it was the next stage of Bill's 'disease'.

We left the boat and those of us with a need to recover our land legs took advantage of the seats overlooking the water.

After lunch John S scheduled the walk over Transit Hill. This involved being driven to the eastern end of the airstrip and walking back over the hill. Only twelve of us turned up to catch the bus, although two others had intended to join them but missed the bus, despite the "All Aboard" from our fearless leader. The rest of the group spent a quiet afternoon, snorkeling, strolling, bike-riding, playing the guitar or resting or whatever.

The Transit Hill group were taken by bus (or had to walk!) to the airstrip, went up the sandy track to Blinky Beach and turned left along the dune to the beginning of the forested walk up Transit Hill. This was a typical Lord Howe Island forest walk - roots everywhere across the track with some wooden steps, some Palms, and the other trees of the Lord Howe Island forest trees. It wasn't a taxing walk, by comparison with the Malabar or the Goat House. But the track was roughish and one had to watch one's feet.

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 7

Eventually the track reached the top of the hill and passed the plaque that informed us that W. S. Condor had observed the Transit of Venus at this very spot on December 8, 1882 and provided the exact latitude and longitude. The lookout provided views across the whole island - to the south the two mountains, Gower and Lidgbird, and to the north the settled area, and the hills of the northern ridge, from Malabar to Kim's to Mt Eliza.

The track down the hill on the northern side was more of the same forest but not as steep as on the south side. At the paddock above Pinetrees both the large group and the pair, still separate, kept to the right and went down to Bowker Rd. along the fence line and then into the same sort of forest but now virtually flat. This was a very brief stroll through the forest until we came out at the Administration Buildings and Lagoon Rd.

Here people went their own way, some to have coffee, some to the Museum, others just to rest.

The remainder of the day was very much the same as usual. People did their own thing but most gathered at the appropriate time at Unit 1 for Happy Hour to hear of John S's planning for us. Dinner was at the Beachcomber where it was Fish Fry night with fried Kingfish, chips and salads and a range of sweets – jellies, ice-cream, and two tarts, passion-fruit, and apple and rhubarb. Once again some of us walked down the hill and back to Ocean View while others returned home on the bus.

And so ended another day in paradise. We learnt that one can get ill, even in paradise.

Day 6 Monday, 6 May Mt Gower and other things

And then there were three ...

Of the 16 hopefuls who boarded the plane in Sydney only three still retained sufficient confidence in their fitness and skills to tackle the mighty Mount Gower – Tony, Michael and John.

Overnight rain had given way to a misty, moist morning with the twin towers of Lidgbird and Gower wreathed by swirling clouds. Grizzled old islanders who knew every mood of the mountains frowned and muttered in their porridge – this was not the sort of day to tackle Gower!

Undaunted, our three heroes strode jauntily to the waiting bus to join their nine climbing companions with light hearts and a song on their lips. The farewell party wished them good climbing and Godspeed.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch ...

The rest of the party busied themselves preparing for alternative entertainment: the majority were off to Little Island; the minority to the museum and Transit Hill, with nurse Bill tending the patient recuperating in the sick bay.

The Little Island group enjoyed an initially damp stroll (so damp that two declined to leave the bus and returned to OV on the bus) along the base of the cliff to the island (a somewhat grandiose description for a large lump of rock right on the high water mark which supports some vegetation).

Eyes were cast skyward searching vainly for a glimpse of the intrepid trio who were somewhere high above, scrambling through the mist and rain. However, the only evidence of life on the mountain was the circling Red Tailed Tropic Birds and Providence Petrels.

Three, or perhaps four (reports varied) Lord Howe Island Woodhens were sighted, thus achieving the goals of this expedition.

On return to OV, FL discerned a need for a change from corned beef sandwiches and in a trice dispatched a dozen eggs to whip up scrambled eggs for ten. All present voted the meal a great success.

Robin and Mavis skipped the eggs, preferring to pocket a sambo and point their bikes in the direction of Boat Harbour. An apparently otherwise unremarkable excursion was enlivened by a “very feral” rat joining them for

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 8

lunch. The scream of one of the party (her name has been suppressed in the interests of decency) was heard all over the island. Grizzled islanders frowned and muttered in their lunches – there be strange goings on this day!

Refusing to share their sambos and passing up the opportunity to earn the rat bounty by killing the said beast and presenting its tail to the Administration, our heroines returned to base camp to tell their tale. Far be it from your humble diarist to suggest it, but another member of the party observed that the size of the rat seemed to increase with each retelling of their epic tale.

Meanwhile, the minority group struggling back from the museum and Transit Hill didn't make it in time for the eggs and settled for a delicious hamburgers and chips at Thompson's Store. They had received their reward earlier through two close encounters with Buff Banded Rails and a philosophical discussion with an Emerald Dove.

After lunch the party split in several directions before filtering back to OV to await the return of the Gower Gallants.

Meanwhile, back on the mountain ...

We pick up the story as the group commenced the climb in pouring rain. Within minutes all were drenched, but gritting their teeth they pressed on, using the sodden ropes to haul themselves ever higher and higher.

On the way up, the views were somewhat limited by the cloud – lets face it, the views were non-existent. Our climbers reported that this was a blessing for two reasons: had they been able to see what lay in front of them and below them, there might well have been second thoughts about proceeding; and coming down, the sodden ropes were kinder on the hands than the drier ropes lower down the slope. However, all three were sustained by the mountain climbers' mantra "where there's rope there's hope!"

The higher they went the wetter and colder they got until, reaching the top plateau, they were all freezing, despite there being little wind. During a break in the weather they took the opportunity to wring about four litres of water out of their shirts and were much more comfortable.

To their regret, the party had to turn back before being able to record their names in the book kept at the summit but they were able to take a few minutes to enjoy the world's soggiest sandwiches and the wondrous sights of the mist forest. Waterlogged cameras and the practical difficulty of taking photographs with one hand while hanging on to a rope with the other precluded a pictorial record of the day's activities.

On the return journey, the clouds lifted when they were about 200 metres from the top revealing the island spread out far below and the difficulties facing them on their way down. Once again they were sustained by the chanting the above-mentioned mountain climbers' mantra.

Apart from a tumble by one of our trio, which fortunately caused no serious damage, they all came through relatively unscathed, unlike another climber who twisted an ankle early in the climb but continued on to the top only to twist it again on the way down. He was in some pain when the bus returned the party to their accommodation.

Our three weary heroes walked into Ocean View to cheers and applause and immediately retired to the comfort of a hot shower.

Their exploits were the subject of much questioning and discussion at happy hour and dinner and those who had remained at sea level paid due respect to their achievement.

PS – It was reported at breakfast the following day that more than one of the three had awoken in the middle of the night with visions of pouring rain, vertical slopes and slippery ropes disturbing their sleep. We trust they regain their equilibrium before too long.

PPS – Michael's entrepreneurial flair was amply demonstrated by his decision to seek a licence to build a cappucino pipeline to the summit of Mt Gower and charge successful climbers a poultice for a cup of the lifesaving liquid.

Day 7

Tuesday, 7 May
Little Island—Free Afternoon

For the second day running, none of our party managed to jog up the hill behind Ocean View to experience the joys of sunrise. However, despite this abysmal performance (or non-performance) the sun did rise heralding another glorious day.

The intrepid conquerors of Mount Gower (John W, Michael and Tony) struggled to breakfast with their aching limbs and minds full of the memories of the previous day's achievement. Needless to say they inflicted the cries of pain and detailed accounts (probably embellished after a night's sleep!) to anyone foolish enough to be eating breakfast at the same time!

By 8.30am breakfast was all but forgotten as most of the group gathered on the jetty for a short ferry ride to North Bay. Tony was pleased that it was on a glass-like surface and lasted only 10 minutes. It meant he did not have to resume his keen interest in oceanography that he found so interesting on the round LHI boat trip! We were soon wading ashore and strolling up the beach to the picnic area – an impressive gathering place with water, BBQ facilities, toilets and shelters.

Mount Eliza is only 147 metres high, but it is a testing jaunt – especially for those recovering from the Mount Gower expedition! As with all the other walks we had done, the views from the top were worth the effort. Not only were they spectacular, but they showed the Island from yet another perspective. On the way up we could hear sounds of workers hacking away at various weeds on the western slopes. Robin helped them by doing her own patch of weeding on the top. An hour or so quickly passed as the rugged coastline around that end of the Island was appreciated and photographed. Many enjoyed sitting, soaking up the view and having a bit of quiet reflection on their own. Others shared in intellectual and philosophical discussions on such topics as geology (What is the difference between intrusions and dykes?) and ornithology (Why do the Red Tailed Tropicbirds spend so much time soaring on the thermals?). To the latter question we decided that, apart from searching for food, they fly for sheer enjoyment in the same way that we walk to the tops of mountains! FL sighted a whale in the ocean – but the general conclusion was that it was really just a whale of a story!

We returned to the temporary camp we had established in the picnic area for morning tea. With our usual cuppa WITH SUGAR (who whinged?? — not a Pom, I should add!) there was a choice of 3 types of biscuits! Is FL trying to spoil us or is it just to use up excess supplies? All jokes aside, we have appreciated the mobile tea breaks supplied by FL on a number of our walks.

Duly fortified, we made our way over to Old Gulch, which we had admired from atop Mount Eliza. Across the stony beach we saw many pieces of dead/fossilised coral. A young tropicbird sat, well camouflaged, amongst the large stones – unfortunately it did not look very healthy. Some of us sat on the beach while others scrambled along the eastern side of the gulch to the Herring Pools on the northern coastline. En route we enjoyed looking into the turbulent waters of the gulch eagerly searching for the turtle that FL saw. By now we have all come to realize that FL has incredible eyesight! A couple of the Mount Gower veterans decided the scramble along the rocks was too much for their weary legs and their sense of safety and slowly returned to the beach.

Those who continued on to the Herring Pools were rewarded with spectacular, pristine pools filled with a magnificent variety of coral, fish, clams and crabs. FL declared that he has never seen the pools look so wonderful. Pity nobody realized the potential for some wonderful under water photographs!

Back at the picnic area the keen snorkellers were preparing to plunge into the clear waters of North Bay. Unfortunately, the water was too shallow, so little more than ankles got wet. Stomachs were a rumbling by now so it was time to walk back to Ocean View for lunch. Most decided to rock hop along the shoreline while some decided to take the Max Nichols track. The rock hoppers made the better decision as the track involve hundreds of steps (mostly going up) and took longer – another example of “The Lord Howe Island Thighs”.

Another sumptuous lunch of sandwiches was topped off with a pineapple fruit cake. Requests for the recipe resulted in a commercial from FL for Ms Daly's “Beating Around the Bush” Cook Book! Are copies available? Yes!!!

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 10

Snoring became the order of the afternoon as several weary bodies soon lapsed into the arms of Morpheus. The more energetic managed to snorkel at Ned's Beach, get a ride to Little Island or stretch out with a good book.

The evening meal was enjoyed at the Pig and Whistle – sorry, the Wolf and Twig. The peace and quiet of other diners was shattered by the usual animated and noisy talking and laughing that has become a hall mark of this holiday. Would you believe that Robin's life journey crossed with Bill and Glen's in the late 50's? Ask her about her heart-throb at the time!

The day contained more moments of "Jouissance" - a new word Mavis has introduced us to which she describes as "an emotional, almost orgasmic experience".

Day 8 Wednesday, 8 May Nursery, Waste, Weather etc

Breakfast today was different – John cooked us pancakes and Tony welcomed each of us by denying access to the delicacies until we told him the nature of our "turn" in the evening.

The diarists were troubled because the day was to be so full of complicated activities. However, with pencils and notebooks poised they determined to listen to everything they were told with far more care than they had shown in all the previous days. Ten o'clock found most of us hurrying from Joy's (or "No Joys") to the Nursery where we were greeted by Jim Dorman. (Was there no aspect of Lord Howe Island that he did not have oversight of?). He introduced us to the Palm nursery, telling us that Palms did not produce seeds until they were 22 years old, that each palm had two sets of seeds at any one time, the younger above. Seedlings from 1-2 inches high to as much as 12 inches high were exported and 30,000 to 50,000 at a time were sent under security, by air to destinations all over the world. The nursery is the only one in the world to have been awarded a certificate of excellence for export of seedlings.

Annette was then introduced and explained that between 1953 and 1980 the Board of Lord Howe Island had exported Palm seeds but this was now banned and replaced by export of high quality seedlings. She explained the system whereby this standard of excellence was achieved with the origin (place, time and picker) following the seedlings throughout the whole germination and she emphasized that the workers understood that excellence was the byword. Seeds collected are fumigated and about 5000 at a time are "boxed out" and dried. The growing medium of perlite and peat moss (Canadian and Russian) is mixed, pasteurized and water added to a moisture level judged by experience and the seeds placed at a depth of 3-4 inches in the medium, the whole sealed in plastic, placed in a polyurethane box and left for up to 7 months. The boxes are stacked on shelves in plastic tunnels where more light and warmth encourage germination which is 65% successful. Germination is very uneven and seedlings are picked out as they achieve the desired height, 3 times in all. Seedlings are graded 1 to 4 by size and for export 500 are washed, dipped in fungicide and packed, wet, in sealed polyurethane boxes. These are flown to Sydney and flown on overseas after accumulating, to reach their destinations (largely Belgium and Holland) in about 7 days. Annette claimed that they experienced little or no quarantine problems. In the shadehouse she showed how non-conforming plants grow on to beautiful examples of all the various palms – Kentia, Belmoriana, Little Mountain and Large Mountain. Plants in the shadehouse are watered with a secret nutrient shower mixture. Robyn and Angela among others muttered about the use of so much peat moss and despite little encouragement from our Leader determined to press for alternatives, perhaps composting the fronds. Meantime we had a sales promo, and largely fell for it....

On the way to the Museum we passed a tree with round yellow fruits, "pluggers" – to be avoided on the whole.

After the usual substantial lunch Kevin drove us to the DUMP on the far side of the airstrip. Geoffrey, one of only two staff, explained that rubbish on the Island was expensive stuff as there is virtually nowhere to bury it. It therefore has to be sorted and minimized and only what is left is compacted and sent to the mainland. Thus paper, cardboard and food is composted, tins, bottles and some plastics are recycled, other plastic is useless

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 11

(one has to buy plastic bags in Island shops). Much of the sorting is done using labelled, public bins and the cooperation of islanders and an educational programme “Earthworks” is run here every year. There are Vincent de Paul and builders’ hardware collections, recyclables pay for themselves and everything compostable goes into the \$1.2 million Vertical Composting Unit, the whole system that has been working now for 2 years.

Septic waste is also dealt with at the DUMP and we heard that because the present aerobic digester was not reliable sand filters are to be installed as soon as money permits. Septic tanks throughout the Island are now being pumped out and the overall goal of the whole waste disposal programme is to prevent ground water being polluted. DUMP is cleverly sited out of view and the site is being replanted using shredded paper and compost as mulch. We were clearly all impressed until Geoffrey said, “Now if we could get rid of National Parks we’d be right” after which we were set wondering –

Note on the VCU – rather disgusting food waste is mixed with rough wood and plant waste and fed up to the top of the Unit. It is composted for 4-6 weeks, the temperature rises up to 80 C and the innocuous and sterile product is stockpiled and free for anyone.

On to the Bureau of Meteorology where we heard we were too early to see the twice-daily balloon go up. Since we were far from anything but the airport most of us hung around either talking to the Met officer or watching the leisurely attention being given to two Army Caribous interestingly decorated with red ribbons. (Once again Jim Dorman and Geoff, the photographer, appeared, this time beside these planes. Clearly there is *nothing* on the Island that Jim is not concerned in.) We saw the hydrogen-filled balloon with its aluminium reflector “target”, go off at precisely the same time as balloons all over the world and watched it float higher and higher in the blue sky. It would rupture apparently not before it reached 18 or 19 km height.

Our last evening and what a joy it was to all - even if a mammoth problem to your diarist. Should I relate all the wondrous jokes coming at us from our MC, Tony’s lips? How can I convey the delight of the music from Michael and his guitar, or of the songs from the brilliant Melbourne quartet of Bill, Glen, Pat and Tony? Or how explain the quiet while we heard favourite readings of Banjo Patterson? Several of us testified to our enormous appreciation of the whole week, with the companionship of the group, the unchanging delights of the Island, with its birds, the perfect weather, the sights while snorkelling, the various walks and especially the day of the climb to the Goathouse. The Mount Gower climb alone was mentioned in less happy terms. We learned more about each other and the wonderful talents and sensibilities within our number finally joining in Michael’s last song, *Waltzing Matilda*, contentedly but a little wistfully at the thought of separating on the next day.

I will include only one joke, the last of the evening told by our Fearless Leader against himself: John Sinclair arriving at the Pearly Gates is interrogated by St Peter about what he has done that could qualify him to enter. He says, “I’ve been a leader of Safari groups for years”, and a Voice from on high immediately says, “Enter at once, you have had your share of Hell” We hope not, John, but thank you.

Day 9 Thursday, 9 May A Free Morning & Farewell

The morning broke fine and was observed by ten of the party (with mad zeal) who ascended the mountain to watch the (6.40 am) sunrise.

After the usual hearty breakfast everyone had to pack his or her main luggage ready for the van to take to the airstrip. A flurry of activity persisted at the unit of the Fearless Leader as the other units were surrendered for cleaning.

Then people were left to their own devices. A few of us went around the Stevens reserve, a quiet walk for foot weary souls. It is densely packed with a variety of trees. Three endemic varieties had been encouraged as possibly suitable for building timber. These are:

Maulwood, which is of the olive genera and is also found in N.E. Australia and New Caledonia. It is a very hard wood as its name suggests.

Scalybark: Sound looking trees with dark brown scaly bark.

Blackbutt, which has distinctive cherry size shiny black fruit.

Other species included:

Greybark distinguished by a rippled surface and a tendency to be covered with pale green algae. Its fruit are small orange berries.

Sallywood, which has hibiscus style flowers in spring and summer. It is also found in Queensland and Norfolk Island.

Banyan trees: Some magnificent specimens are to be seen. The figs of this tree are pierced by a native wasp which lays its eggs inside. After the larvae hatch and grow they fly away taking with them precious pollen to be deposited in another fig which contains the flower on the inside of the fruit.

Thatch palms: (Kentia) distinguished by leaflets which droop off the midrib.

Curly Palm: (Kentia Belle) has fronds which shoot up and then bend downwards. Both palms have ellipsoid hard seeds about 3-5 cms long.

Other timber at the entrance of the walk was Hoop pine bought in for building. Other imported timbers included N.Z. pine, tallowwood and southern blue gum.

Birdlife was scant today but we sighted an Emerald dove and blackbirds. We did however hear a golden whistler and possibly a European song thrush.

Other places visited were Ned's Beach by three of our devoted snorkellers who reported that the coral colours were at their best in bright sunlight.

As I write, after our final lunch, we have been informed that our plane will be 30 minutes late and some may miss connections.

At the airport at last with many of us flourishing Kentia palm seedlings and our main luggage weighed in we note that there is also a bicycle and several kayaks as well as boxes of palm seedling freight to be carried. Some doubt concerning the overall payload so we are individually weighed in with our hand luggage. Satisfied at last, we are soon on board and bidding "Au revoir" to Lord Howe Island.



The Owl and the Stingray

By Enid Haarhoff

With apologies to Edward Lear

The Owl and the Stingray set off to Mt Gower
On a beautiful palm green pole
They took some honey and plenty of money
Wrapped with a snorkelling mask

The Owl looked up to the stars above
And sang to a small guitar
*"Oh lovely stingray, Oh Stingray my love
"What a beautiful stingray you are,
"You are! You are! You are!
"What a beautiful stingray you are!"*

Stingray said to the owl,
*"You elegant fowl,
"How charmingly sweet you sing.
"Oh let us be married,*

*“Too long we have tarried
“But what shall we do for a ring?”*

They climbed with ropes for hours and hours
To the top where the banyans grow
And there in the cloud a turtle stood
With rings on his ancient toes
His Toes! His Toes! His toes!
With rings on his ancient toes

*“Dear turtle are you willing
“To sell for one shilling a ring?”*

Said the turtle, *“I will!”*
They took it away
And were married the next day.
By John Sinclair who lives on Mt Lidgbird

They dined on lava and slices of guava
Which they ate with a Lord Howe spoon
And hand in hand on the edge of the cliff
They danced by the light of the moon”—
The Moon! The Moon! The Moon!
They danced by the light of the moon”—

So Many Precious Moments of Joy Mavis Clements

The overall stunning beauty and diversity
Of reef, ocean, forests and mountains,
The call of the Golden Whistler,
The colourful flash of Sacred Kingfisher in flight,
The ubiquitous Golden Orb Spider
Intricate webs with magnificent sea views,
The aerial ballet of Terns and Tropic birds,
Poetry in motion.
The eeriness and interconnectedness of huge Banyans
In the Valley of Shadows.
The delicate beauty of fungi in hidden locations,
The delight of swimming with fishes at Ned’s Beach,
The unexpected kaleidoscope of colours and patterns
In the Herring pools.
The gentle waving manoeuvres of soft corals,
The darting and fluttering of reef fish,
Their continuous, ever-changing parade of
Dots and spots and stripes and patterns and shapes.
The unfolding colours of sunrise,
The laughter and discussions,
The sharing and warmth of friendship.

IMPRESSIONS OF LHI WITH GBS AND FL.

Mavis Clements

Diary — 2002 Lord Howe Island Safari — 14

Concerns of the busy, demanding world
Soon left behind.
Turning to a natural world
Of charm and serenity
Where beauty unfolds
In microcosms of wonder and delight.

Most beautiful island in the world
'Tis declared,
Vistas dominated by remnant volcanic mountains
At every turn,
Diverse landscapes, spectacular topography to discover,
And appreciate in close encounters.

Old friendships cementing
New friendships unfolding.
Happiness and laughter,
Challenges and successes,
Experiences we share.
Special memories to cherish,
Future connections.
Happiness for tomorrow
Because of yesterday.