

Admiralty Islands

December
2015



NSW, Lord Howe Island and Tasmania

Sunday 6th - Wednesday 9th December, NSW East Coast

We left on the 6th of December for Sydney, then drove down the coast to Guerilla Bay, where we had hired a holiday home. After a difficult week following the 'walk-in theft of our phones, MacBook air, and Jim's cards last Friday, followed by a rush to find a house sitter, we finally left Perth at 3pm, arriving at the Sydney hotel at 10.30. Hilary had not eaten the plane meal and the hotel could only offer chips and toasted cheese. Breakfast was standard fare and pricey.

The reliable TomTom guided us south to Kiama, mentioned by Danny as a pretty town, and it is. We drove around for a while, stopped at the park on the bay, and then continued to Guerilla Bay, a little south of Batemans Bay where Jim had booked a house for two nights. Jim had time to see the pretty beach/bay down the pathway before Danny arrived.

There was no internet, no phone, but good company. The kitchen was adequate, as were the beds and general spaces.

Guerilla Bay, 20km south of Batemans Bay



The next day we travelled as far as the town of Bega (Cheese Factory and museum) with son-in-law Danny and grandchildren Lydia and Michael, to evaluate a move somewhere on the NSW coast; but nothing attracted us. We had lunch in the museum cafe, which satisfied everyone but Hilary, who had the quiche; disappointingly dry and tasteless. The weather was mostly cloudy and damp, but that was not a problem for us, as we were looking for a cooler climate to move to.

Fancy and productive Bega cows, with Jim and Michael poring over old technology.



On Wednesday we met up with our daughter Maria at Sydney airport (walking distance from the hotel) and shared a meal with her in the Qantas lounge. We thought we would have very limited time, but due to an electrical storm which delayed her flight, we were able to spend a few hours together.

Thursday 10th December, Lord Howe Island

We then flew to Lord Howe Island; now there is a place Jim could happily live! Since the plane was to leave at 11:30am, we walked over from the hotel. The plane only had 36 seats, hence the limit of 7kg cabin and 17kg in the hold. Jim had to shuffle a little into Hilary's luggage and then we were through, though the oversized cabin bags were taken at the plane's steps and placed in the hold; Jim kept his camera though, in case he could get a snapshot through the porthole. The two hour flight was uneventful for this almost full plane, though the landing was a little bumpy with the strong side wind.

Our 36 seater aeroplane*Lord Howe Airport*

We were met by a woman in a van, who drove to almost all accessible venues in 15 minutes, describing where the facilities were, before dropping us at Beachcomber. It was a good introduction to the island, though Hilary didn't get any sense of direction from it. Vegetation is prolific - every home has to retain 90% as nature provides, so they are hidden in the trees. There are no eucalyptus so fires are unknown. The small gardens are planted thickly with a large variety, some we recognise.

The island is small but very steep, heavily forested in parts. Birds are abundant on the eastern cliffs, drifting on the constant cool wind. Magnificent! We have also visited some of the Hawaiian and Tahitian islands, and New Caledonia - none compare to Lord Howe, possibly because it is small, has a small population, much forest has been retained, AND it's Aussie!

We were surprised at the elevation difference in the town. Jim had assumed it to be mostly flat, but the slope from the lagoon on the west to the ridge on the east is very steep, though not long, fortunately. Bicycles vastly outnumber motorised vehicles, which posed a problem for Hilary, who would have welcomed the help. The speed limit is 25km for those with cars, only residents; everyone else uses leg power or bicycles, some with battery help. However, we needed supplies, so bravely (or foolheartedly) with only leg power, we headed down the southern road to the largest grocery shop, Joy's.

All familiar food supplies come in by boat from the mainland, and are very pricey. We were told that Woolworths has an on-line service as well, at a more affordable price! There are downsides to living in paradise, it seems.

Eggs were unavailable until the next boat came in (sometime on Saturday) so Jim headed along Lagoon road to the other 'main town supplies' to possibly get them, whilst Hilary waited at an outside table at Joy's, but no luck at the co-op shop either (Jim later discovered Thompson's store was next door and may have had eggs). So back along Lagoon road to Joy's; stopping at the cycle hire to price and reserve a bicycle and 4-wheel electric gopher. We didn't bother with mechanical aid in the end.

Loaded with a 2 litre orange juice bottle, 3 litre longlife milk, 2 large fruit cans, bread, yogurt, a tin of bully beef, bacon, tomatoes, and Jim's camera, we started back up the hill in the humid, scorching hot afternoon. Hard for overloaded Jim, but almost impossible for Hilary, so we stopped to rest on benches placed at three strategic points. Unknown to us at the time, at the first bench we stopped at (which is just manageable without too much stress) is a shortcut path (where we observed a youngster on a bicycle head through the bush) which cuts off another steeper and longer climb up and around a corner, where our third rest bench invited us over.

Hilary was struggling to continue after the steepness of the road, her heart objecting with its weird and wacky rhythm, and the thought of repeating this torturous climb weighed heavily on her to the point of rejecting any other climbs ever again! The sidetrack rises gradually, and meets up just down from what became our favourite restaurant; and a short flat walk to Beachcomber.

Second resting bench

Notice the green shopping bag and Jim's black backpack, on the ground next to it.



At Beachcomber's, after resting for a while, Hilary borrowed 4 eggs from the kitchen for our breakfast, and replaced them as soon as we found some. The ones from the kitchen were local, and much nicer, but locals are limited in what produce they can sell to tourists. They have cattle but no slaughterhouse due to health concerns.

WiFi has to be purchased, though the accommodation info sheet states that it's free, very misleading. It's slow and expensive, so we needed to be careful, and landed up spending \$30 in 4 days, just to keep our family up to speed on facebook. Telstra mobile doesn't operate either, no towers, though you would think it could be relayed via one of the many satellite dishes.

We later stumbled along to the Pandanus, a 200 metre walk from Beachcomber accommodation, to find an excellent small restaurant, with food as good as any in France, where the brilliant chef (part Kiwi/Papuan) had long dreadlocks tied back into a tail. He is also an artist/photographer, and handyman. The hard working locals have to work all manner of jobs in any one day just to make ends meet. He spent all day helping to lay a new brick pathway at Beachcomber's then we saw him at the Pandanus restaurant, working at a hot stove in the kitchen! You could say that he was a glutton for punishment.

Friday 11th December, Lord Howe

Hilary was still feeling the effects of yesterday, so Jim decided to walk the northern hills, first stopping at the cycle shop to cancel the booking, but they only opened at 9am. Jim continued along the lagoon road for a few hundred metres to the track start, a small bridge over the only permanent water on the island. The track runs between the west lagoon and the paddock where the first settlement was established, affording good views of the mountains over the lagoon. The island was discovered in 1788, and the first settlers arrived in 1840, three men with their Maori wives and two children. It became a stopover for water and some food for whaling ships.

The steep hills are forested down to the slightly flatter paddock. The well maintained track is stepped by thick timber vertical planks holding back rock and gravel or roots and bare rock. This first part rises to a fork at 140 metres; leading west to North Beach and Mt. Eliza at 149 metres, the furthest west point, or north to Kim's Lookout at 182 metres, on the northern cliff edge, from which Jim could see west to Mt. Eliza, east to the Admiralty Islands, and south east to Mt. Gower. Jim spent 30 minutes happily snapping the scenery using the tripod to steady the camera, mostly along the vertical cliff, buffeted by a cool wind on this hot humid day.

Looking south from Malabar Hill, left is the fish viewing Ned's Beach, right the lagoon and Mounts Lidgbird and Gower

Our accommodation was somewhere between beach and lagoon; to the right of picture

Balls Pyramid Island is just visible in the haze, poking up behind the left slope of Intermediate Hill; centre picture



The many birds circle and glide on the updraught or nest on the cliff, face; sooty terns seem to be in the majority, followed by the lovely white tropic birds trailing red tail feathers.



The track east to Malabar at 209 metres, while still up and down, is relatively easy, and mostly in shade, with several open spots allowing the cool breeze through and providing another view of the cliff. Malabar provides a similar 360 degree view as Kim's, but is adjacent to the pretty Admiralty Islands. Birds are even more numerous; Jim tried several times to snap the tropic birds as they hovered close to him on the cliff edge, but he was never fast enough. The south view along the length of the island over the town to the mountains has been photographed numerous times, but that does not detract from it.

This steep ridge is composed of vesicular basalt, the remains of a volcano, centring on the lagoon, the caldera. The cliff is constantly eroded by the wind, though this is slow.

Jim again spent some time here, using the tripod to hopefully get good compositions and varied exposures, to allow for further Photoshop manipulation. It was midday and time to head down, initially down the wrong way as Jim had missed the sign 10 metres back. The track down this side seemed more rocky with more up and down, but it may have been due his tiredness from the day before, and the cloying heat. Finally, it ended in another paddock, with another bridge and a boot washer for the Phytophthora (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phytophthora>) near Ned's Beach road.

Jim joined the couples either side of our room, chatting on the veranda while he cooled down. Ken and Denise Springer from Brisbane were due to leave in the morning; the younger (50-ish) couple from Sydney are fit and very enthusiastic, getting into every action available. They are here for 10 days.

Jim on the verandah at Beachcomber



Dinner was again at Pandanus as Hilary hadn't arranged transport elsewhere - Jim used the public Telstra phone to book it (5 mins away) for 50c. A slightly different menu, and again excellent, but Hilary stuck to the local fish, with different seasoning every night, which she found superb. Hilary is exceptionally fussy, so finding a restaurant within easy walking distance was a godsend.

At Beachcomber we chatted to Ken and Denise for a few hours, finding out more about them, and sharing some of our experiences and travels. Ken worked on the railways and Denise taught at TAFE, but both retired now. They live in Brisbane in the same house since they got married. Wonder how that feels? We both seem quite rootless, with our moving every few years when the children were young, and we still don't seem to be able to stop.

Saturday 12th December, Lord Howe

The storm arrived at 7 am, intense for a short spell, and left a cloudy sky and cool temperature; so different to yesterday. By 9 o'clock the clouds lightened, so we visited the small but informative Museum in the south, walking the 'circuit route' as Jim didn't check the map, confusing it with the hall on the north in the main town. But we did get eggs at Thompson's store, probably shipped in earlier; plus an ice cream and milk. Lagoon road is pleasant and flat, so we arrived in fair shape at the museum where the cafe is operated by the Pandanus team, hence the lunch was also good.

Museum Cafe

The Museum has two rooms, one environmental (birds, vegetation, fish) and the other history. They had a difficult time surviving the war as ships were all in the war effort meaning supplies were curtailed for several months till the RAAF flew in supplies before a ship could be sent every 3 months. Several men went to war, two did not return.

Early settler boat

Walking the big hill this time was easier owing to the cooler weather and the bush track shortcut Ken told us about (Hilary got in a bush walk)! When we got back to Beachcomber we saw Ken and Denise were still there; the storm had stopped all flights. They had given us their butter, so we gave enough back for the day. Qantas was paying for their accommodation and food, so they weren't too fussed about the extended holiday.

Jim walked later to 'Jim's Point' 5 minutes east, not expecting much, but he loved it. The road ends on a fenced paddock of cows, but Jim saw a bench and table under a Norfolk tree on the cliff edge, so climbed over the rope at a gate. This is the best seascape ever, perhaps surpassing Tsitsikamma. The sea has cut small coves into the 40 metre cliff, exposing cross-bedded sandstone while the low tide left a braided shore.

Jim's Point looking south toward Mounts Lidgbird and Gower



The Admiralty Islands lie to the north, Mt Gower towers over the island to the south wreathed in cloud, green pastures in front, and more cliff to the left, another island further on. Birds circle and nest everywhere, many so tame Jim could get two metres from them. On the edge of a sandstone ledge grew a lone flower, nodding in the strong cool breeze which eventually chased Jim back. This is a view of which Jim would never tire.

Jim's Point looking north toward Admiralty Islands



Dinner tonight was burgers at Beachcomber, shared with Ken and Denise - they were scheduled to leave the next day, via Sydney.

Sunday 13th December, Lord Howe

Still cloudy, but clearing. Ken and Denise were again stranded. Denise was angry now, as another family were flying to Brisbane on schedule, and they had to move rooms, though Qantas is paying for all meals and the room.

We walked up to the nearby tiny Top Shop where milk was available - Jim could have saved the pain of carrying it up the hill from Joy's shop. A five minute walk and we were at Jim's Point again. This time the sky was almost clear, as was Mt Gower. Jim just had to set up for more shots again, including one movie scan. What a view! A house here with plate glass to allow for a 200 degree view would be his ideal. The sooty terns were very curious, hovering in the updraught a metre away several times. Strangely, Jim's awe of their streamlined beauty was tinged with fear of attack, remember The Birds movie!



After lunch at 'home' we walked the short distance to Ned's beach. On entering the shallow water, Jim was surrounded by fish up to 50cm long. One can buy food here to attract them, as well as get all the water gear. Jim went in and out several times attempting to snap them - difficult in the shallows. Jim even used the 5D with a polariser. He briefly tried deeper water with the small camera, but had forgotten the snorkel and the wind cooled him rapidly. He considered trying again the next day.

Fish come right up for a feed

At 4pm Jim walked down to 'town' as he suspected the photo he saw in the camera magazine (October 2013) was taken on the rocks below the war memorial. It's a good spot to use a wide angle to capture the wave-cut platform and moss-covered serrated sandstone remnants, as well as the bay and mountains, lit up by the late afternoon sun. A small supply ship was tied up to the pier on the north side of the rocks.

Fish fry or baked with salads at Beachcomber tonight, plenty to eat but nothing special, would have preferred Pandanus.

Monday 14th December, Lord Howe

We were up early on this clear warm day to walk to Middle Beach, and the Valley of Shadows. An easy walk to Middle Beach, apart for the steep steps at the cliff edge. The tide was in but we thought we could cross the two ridges of rocks on the beach between waves. It wasn't possible for Hilary having already been wet at the first ridge. We tried to cross to the Valley road through the bush but were defeated by the many Mutton Bird holes and undergrowth; even finding the return to the path was unclear.

Trying to take a shortcut across Middle Beach.

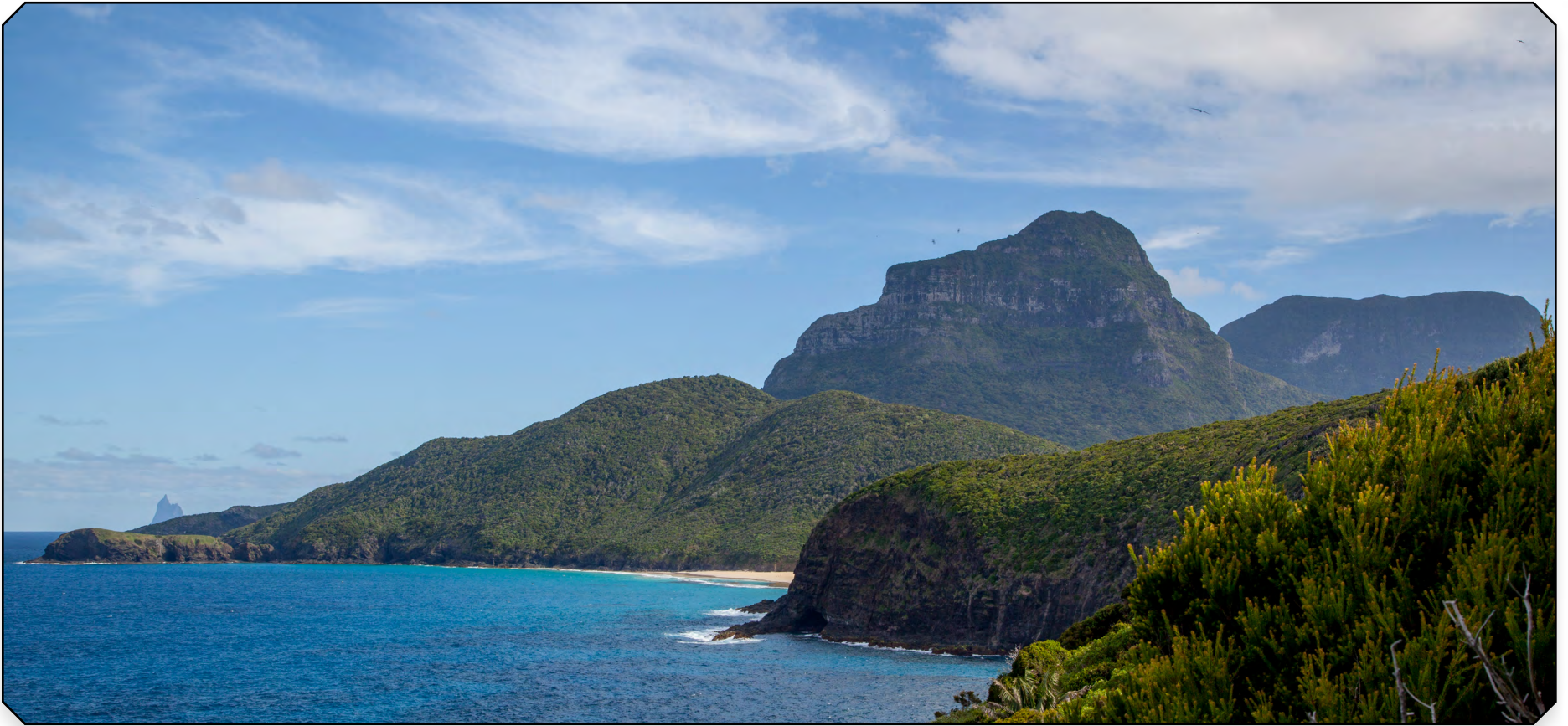
We both got quite wet, but luckily Hilary's phone didn't.



At the path start, on Middle Beach road near Pandanus, Hilary returned to Beachcombers, while Jim mistakenly went down the hill to find the path for Transit Hill. It actually starts from another parallel track, clear on the map, and Jim had even noted it. So Jim stopped at Joy's for milk, and continued along Lagoon road turning east at the Admin road and on up the track. 200m in is the turn for Transit Hill, which Jim missed ending at Middle Beach road again! An hour later Jim was on Transit Hill lookout platform (121m) offering good views north and south; Jim had a half hour here and returned via the dairy in 30 mins, about 2km.

At 3 we left for Clear Place Point, about 2km, half on the same Middle Beach road, then bush track with a fair bit of up and down - tough for Hilary. The Banyans are enormous, and pandanus prolific. Jim had seen plants that looked like Cape Gooseberry, confirmed by green fruit on a few. Has not become a weed here, but was a source of food till the birds discovered them. Good views with benches at the Middle Beach track, and again at Clear Place Point, and Valley of the Shadows.

The latter is merely a gully of pandanus and banyan, but Balls Pyramid Island is visible from Clear Place, poking up behind the foothill slope of Intermediate Hill and Blinky Beach to its right, where the airstrip lies. This tall narrow rock was the last refuge for the local stick insect which became extinct on Lord Howe Island due to rats, which are now almost under control. An ingenious device, a T-shaped 50mm pipe is filled with poison at the bottom end where birds wont find it, but rats do.

Looking south to Balls Pyramid, Transit and Intermediate Hills, then Mounts Lidgbird and Gower in the distance*Taken from Clear Place*

Dinner at Pandanus again, and just as good. A big surprise - Ken and Denise walking in. They went to the airport, waited a little and were told their plane was grounded as the air-con in the cockpit had failed! Tonight they're at a different place, so they have had two nights and meals paid by Qantas. Fairly happy after the initial anger. We joked about being on our plane tomorrow, or that we could both be still here tomorrow night. We will leave Beachcomber at 10 am, to go to the Museum, where the transport will get us (with our bags) at 1 pm for the flight at 2:10 pm.

Tuesday 15th December, Lord Howe to Tasmania

Another clear warm day, a pity to leave. Jim feels that he's only missed the reef tour (Ned's is interesting, but not spectacular) and maybe the climb of Mt Gower, but Jim doubted he could do it in the time allocated by the guides. But he's covered everything else, so no regrets.

We left at 9:30am, walking first to the museum after a while on the beach. K&D had arrived earlier to watch a movie about the island. We had under 1 hour gaps between flights at Sydney and Melbourne, easily accomplished with the help of a wheelchair, and a 'people mover' for Hilary, arriving in Hobart at 9pm. Just in time to get the room key and buy a few groceries.

Wednesday 16th December, Tasmania

While in Tasmania we were driven around mostly by our daughter Karen, and a few days we had the car. Karen drove us along some of the west and eastern shores. While views from the east are good, the gardens are wind-blown; there's a reason that Sandy Bay is expensive - clearly the sunniest, most sheltered area.

We went as far as Tinderbox, and then Tranmere on the east. We were unpleasantly surprised to find the prices more than expected, especially with a water view. Sandy Bay is still Jim's favourite, but buying there would mean exchanging our lovely home for something smaller there, at the same price. So it looks like we will be in Perth for a while yet.

We had soup at Karen's later, made in her Thermomix, saves standing over a stove and nothing gets burned, and then we drove her car to our motel so we could get an early start in the morning.

Thursday 17th December, Tasmania

The first thing Jim wanted to see again was Port Arthur convict settlement. It has been extensively renovated since we were here in the 1980's. We first stopped at the Tessellated Pavement at Eaglehawk Neck, along the Arthur Highway. Hilary didn't get out the car, and Jim spent an inordinately long time taking these shots!



Convict settlement at Port Arthur



Church with no roof, and lunch in the new visitor's centre



Friday 18th December, Tasmania

Karen had an appointment in town, so we did some sightseeing, but got bored quickly.

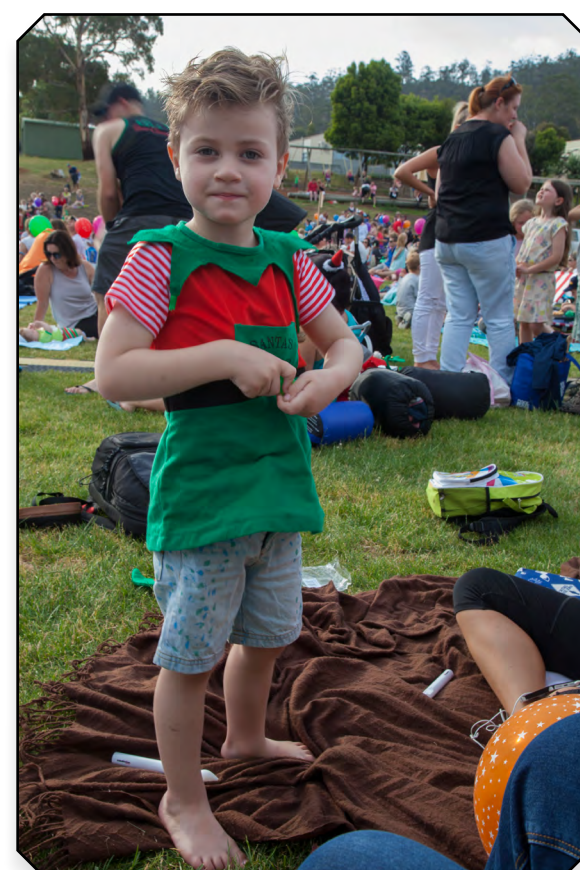
Cat and Fiddle Arcade and Muffin Break where we had coffee.



Then we went to Karen's workplace (Aged Care facility) where they put on a Christmas lunch for the old folks.

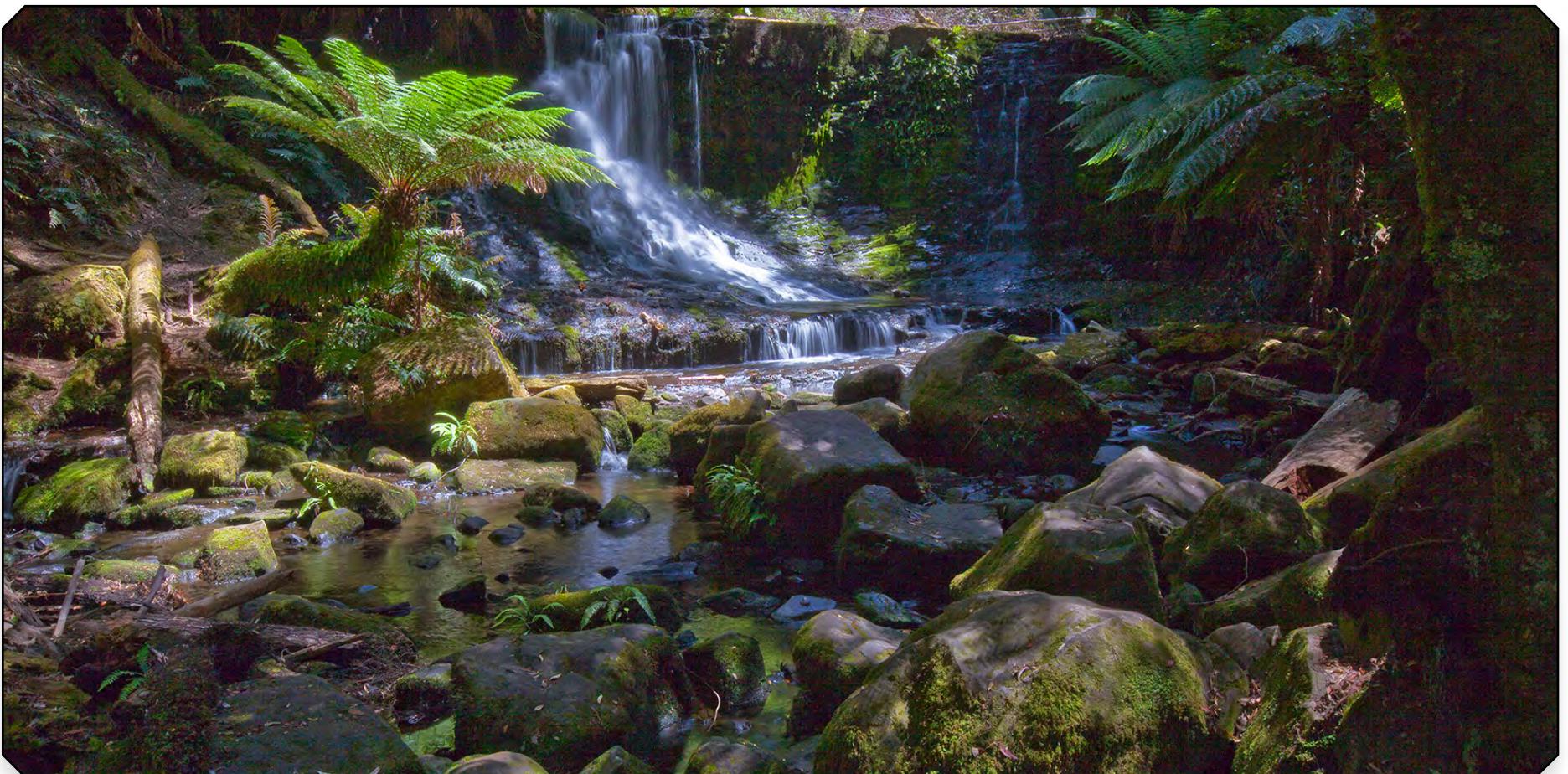
We ate some of the left overs, then went inside when the weather turned and had coffee in the staff kitchen.

Oscar at the Carols the next day.



Saturday 19th December, Tasmania

Karen took us to Russell Falls in Mt Field National Park, where we climbed up to Horseshoe Falls, then Jim walked on to the Tall trees, taking lots of photos. The girls went back to the visitor centre and ordered take away drinks and cookies from the canteen, then picked him up at the trees. Lunch at Salmon Ponds was disappointing - not at all like it used to be. Pancakes have replaced the full menu; they weren't bad, just unexpected.

Russell Falls***Horseshoe Falls***

Tall Trees



Brad's Stepbrother Carlos, his son, then his brother in law protecting his new daughter from careless feet.



The Carols were kicked off with the worst group we've ever heard, so we had to endure our ears being tortured for about 2 hours until the main event started. It was put on by a local church, and hopefully they won't repeat that mistake next year. The pastor spent some time preaching, which was mostly ignored, with the crowd only really responding when Santa appeared and Santa type songs were sung. There was however, a core group of people who stood near the stage and worshipped the One whose name adorns this mostly secular time of the year.



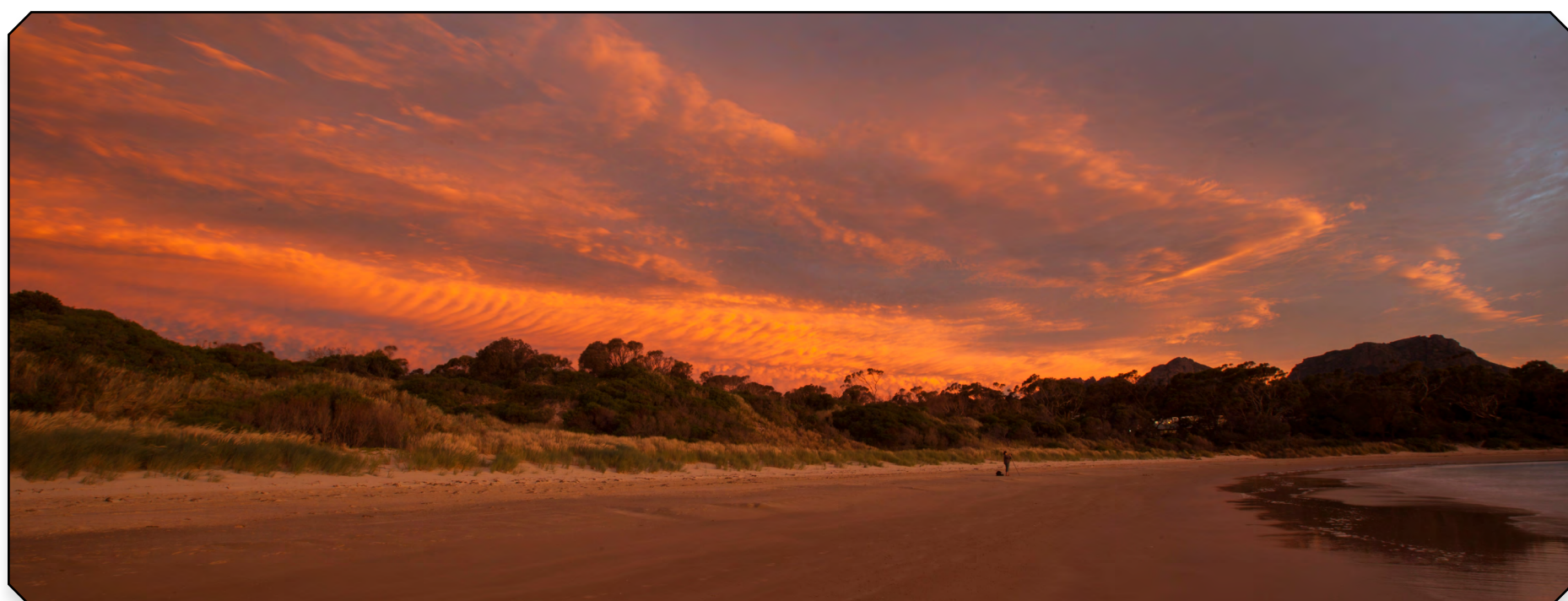
Sunday 20th December, Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay

A 3 hour drive northeast took us to Coles Bay, a place Jim has wanted to visit ever since our brief visit in 1982. Karen drove us and her two children in her decidedly overloaded car, but it saved us having to hire a car. When we arrived it was steaming hot, with no air-con in the small caravan park chalets. We wondered how it was even possible for Tasmania to get this hot, hoping fervently that this spell would not last.

David and Ailine had arrived on the 19th and Danny and Maria arrived soon after us, about 2pm. Ailine had taken photos earlier on the rocks across the water to the large granite domes, the Hazards of the Freycinet National Park. Very strong winds commenced from the east, bringing dark clouds but no rain. Most of the family wanted to swim in the choppy waves in this sheltered Oyster Bay, but Ailine and Jim were happily snapping away up the beach for over an hour.

A thunderous storm cooled the temperature down to a more manageable temperature by late afternoon, but still warmer than we expected. Karen was the first to the BBQ; have to be quick off the mark here or you wait until everyone ahead of you is finished. Danny and Maria joined us, so they grabbed our hot plate before anyone else could.

David and Ailine were off taking pictures, and we were just about finished when they pitched up. We had to vacate the only table, so left them to it, going up to their unit later. Hilary encouraged Jim to go back down to the beach when the clouds parted on the south-westerly sky to reveal a good sunset. He and Ailine went to capture it, about 8pm. Quite beautiful!

Sunset, taking advantage of cloud cover on day one***Beautiful clouds***

Monday 21st December, Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay

Jim went down to the rocky beach early morning



A good clear day to walk the track to Wineglass Bay, but everyone was too slow, so at 10am we all drove to the visitor centre, just a few mins away, where Jim was able to extend the Russell Falls park payment to cover this one and Cradle park later. A twisty road took us to the unimposing lighthouse and a short walkway on the cliff edge, providing good views south over Pirates Bay, the cliffs of Wineglass Bay and North to Friendly Beach. It was mostly a fairly level walk, with some boardwalk installed in less accessible areas.

We went off the boardwalk, up a rough track to the rather uninspiring lighthouse.



This walk is a circle route, which was more slippery on the old track going down. Hilary was grateful for the stability afforded by the sticks she uses to keep her from falling, or getting a pinched nerve in her back. Better than endless pain medication.

We surprised Karen with a late birthday cake at 1pm. Ailine had arranged the cake, and for us adults to have dinner together at the very upmarket hotel in the park to celebrate Karen's 50th in September, because we were unable to join her then. She was suitably surprised and delighted that we had not let her milestone go unnoticed. The meal was delicious, not as good as Lord Howe's Pandanus, but in a great setting overlooking the water. Milos' and Hurst's ate very large banquets of seafood on layered platters. Too much for us!



In the late afternoon Jim walked down to the Coles Bay beach again, but onto the large granite boulders offering a fair view of the Hazards. The kids and Danny tried out the water. Too cold for most of us!

Tuesday 22nd December, Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay

Maria and Hilary stayed in the camp, but the rest of the family went up the slope of Mount Amos, starting the track to the viewpoint at 8.30 am. Wineglass Bay is spectacular, but would look even better on a clear day. Perhaps winter, with less cloud cover? The climb was steep but easy on a new well built path. The massive granite boulders reflecting light, reminded Jim of the view from the dining room across the broad valley on the farm in Africa (Rhodesia) though clouds kept drifting over.

David and Bethany decided to take a longer 3 hour walk around Hazards Beach and Great Oyster Bay to get back to the car park. They came back pretty knackered, at least Bethany admitted to that. None of the others felt walking down the beach way was worth the effort, and the heat didn't encourage them either.

Oscar did very well, he's in the blue hoody, and the other grandchildren did a great job of taking it in turns to help Karen out with him. He socialised so well at the caravan park that he made a few friends his own age at the kids park; the trick was to know where he had gone visiting them!

Wineglass Bay lookout

Taking a well earned rest after the climb, whilst the photographers did their thing

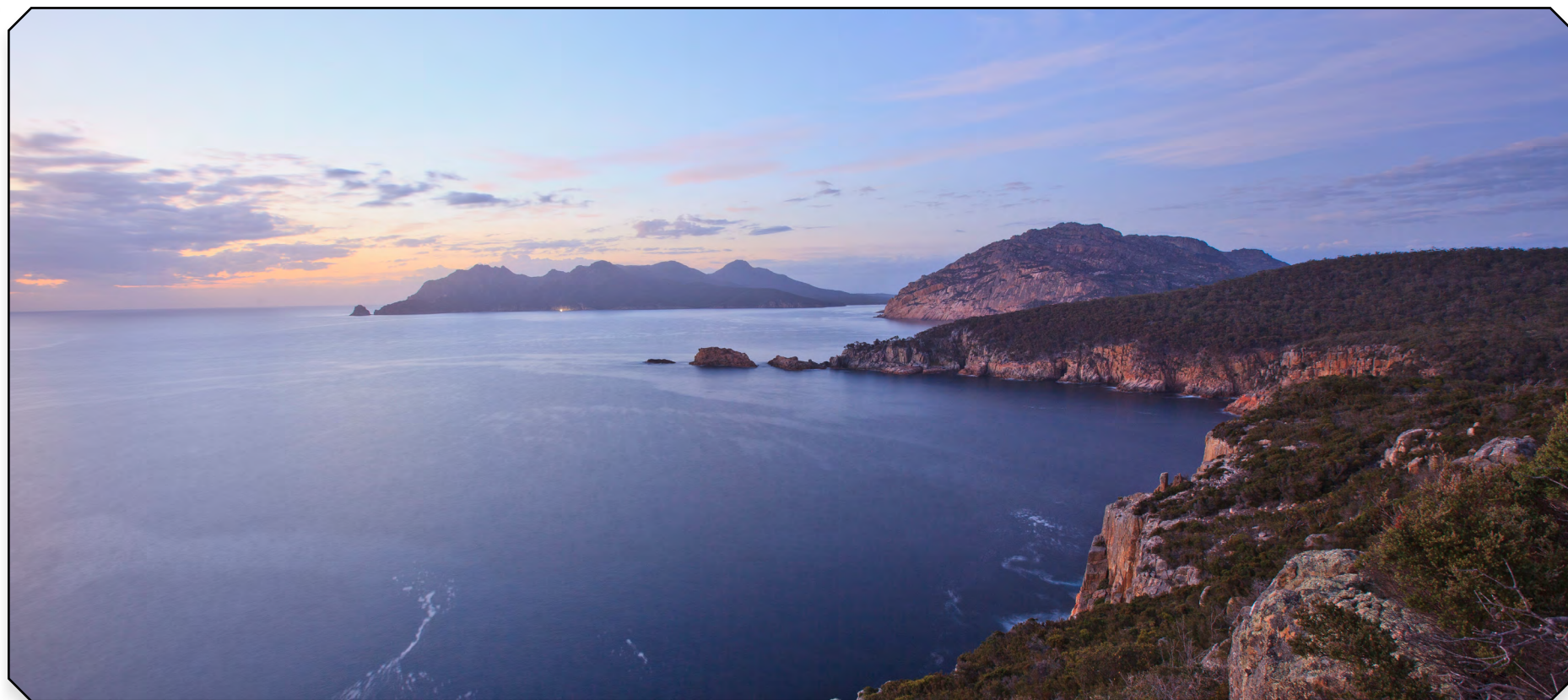


Late afternoon, Ailine, David and Jim drove to another set of boulders near the main Coles Bay, and then to the Friendly Beach 20km north. Some good shots and back just in time for the BBQ. Ailine is very busy when photographing; different heights, positions, lenses, filters. Jim tends to choose a few spots, set the tripod and shoot far too many as he's unsure of what the result will be. They still have a lot to learn.

Friendly Beach

Wednesday 23rd December, to Hobart Tasmania

Before we left Freycinet, David, Ailine and Jim were up at 4am to go to the lighthouse again. Interesting results, again they took far too many shots as they don't know what they're doing!. The sunrise was okay, but not spectacular due to low cloud banks, and Jim was disappointed that the cliffs did not turn a deeper red, but the sea is very smooth in the early shots (long exposure). Early morning is not for the faint hearted! Which meant most of us.

Pirates and Wine Glass bays

We drove south back to Hobart from Coles Bay, taking some good shots along the way. Jim started out in Danny and Maria's car to get to a spot ahead of us stragglers, until Karen and Hilary caught up. The first stop was a lookout on the road about 30km southwest where a vineyard has built a tower view of Oyster Bay. A better unofficial stop 200 metres further, on a small flat next to an old shed. Probably stepping onto private land, but just had to do it, to duplicate a photo hanging in the Caravan Park reception which Hilary had seen spotted in the Iluka Park office, so Jim checked it out and also wanted to take it.

Looking north to Freycinet

We stopped at a Berry farm just outside Swansea - expensive but delicious. We all decided to get lunch in Richmond, but Jim has no photos of this stopover. Karen dropped us off at the Shoreline Hotel, right next to Shoreline Shopping Centre. Handy for getting supplies for us, and for pre-Christmas shopping the next day.

Thursday 24th December, Hobart Tasmania

Karen met us at the supermarket and we shopped for our family's contribution to the menu the next day. One of the participants had pulled out of doing the potato salad, due to health issues, so Hilary opted to do it instead. Fortunately, Karen also has a chopper, which makes it so much easier to do salads.

We spent most of the day preparing our contribution, fruit salad, potato salad and Ham. It was pleasant just to chat and work toward the goal of making Christmas a good day for those coming to share with us. No photos today; all too busy.

Friday 25th December, Hobart Tasmania

We went to our old church in the morning, and met a few of the people we knew before. The music and singing was good, the brief sermon appropriate. Jim felt strongly that we do need to come back here; we left exactly 20 years ago; we had new year's night in Esperance WA 1996, having taken 4 days from Melbourne in the MB from off the overnight ferry, the 27th.

The church has moved from South Perth and call themselves 'Velocity Church' now. We have no idea why. The congregation has been greatly diminished since we left in 1995. They bought an old school, and are in the process of renovating the buildings to suit a church. The main gathering place has no windows, with a painted black ceiling, and fairy lights slung back and forth underneath it. They were not on, thankfully, and we enjoyed the service.

Returning to our hotel, we had another quick look at Tranmere nearby before heading to Karen for lunch. There are some pockets of large houses and smaller neat ones, so Jim's a little more settled to perhaps buy there. He would prefer Sandy Bay, but blocks are small and expensive. Tarooma has too much shade and further south is possibly too far, and also small blocks eg Kingston. Well, the Lord has to help us sell up in Perth for this to happen anyway.

No pickies from Jim for lunch, but Hilary couldn't resist taking photos of the food with her iPhone. We spent lunch with our family and some of Brad's family for the first time in Brad and Karen's home. It was Hilary's 70th birthday.



Saturday 26th December, Hobart Tasmania

We all met up again at Salamanca Market, but the weather set in, to spoil it. David and Ailine left for Launceston before the front hit them, but the rest of us went and had breakfast at a nearby cafe.



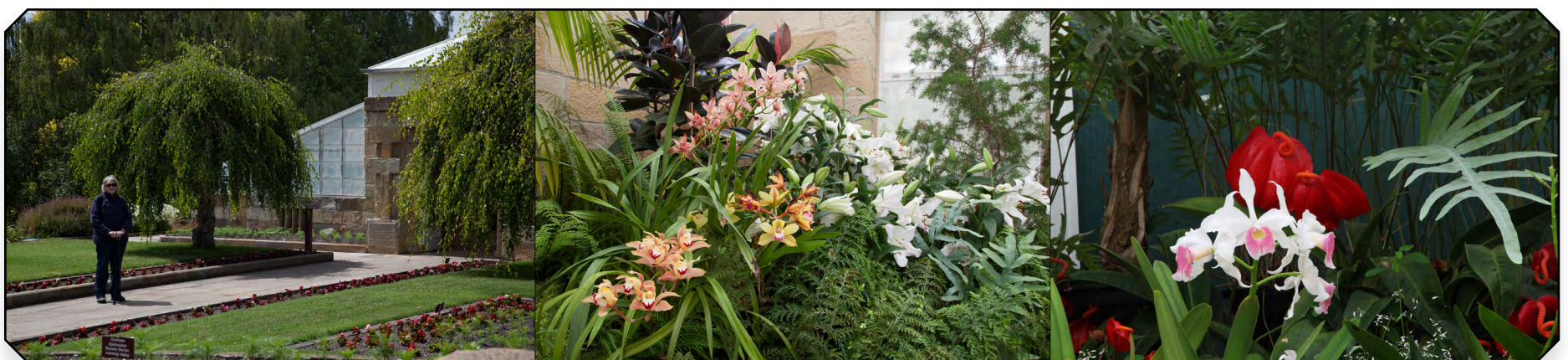
Then we met up with Brad at the cinema and watched a film called 'Joy' starring Robert De Niro, Virginia Madsen, Bradley Cooper, and Isabella Rossellini, to celebrate his birthday. Brad went to spend time with his dad, and Karen drove us south of Hobart so we could see more of the area.

Sunday 27th December, Hobart Tasmania

We went back to Velocity Church, but this time the fairy lights were put on when the music started, and much to our distaste they blinked crazily to the beat of the music. It reminded us more of a disco than a serious worship time, and we decided this was not our scene; let alone what it would do to Hilary's brain. We got out as fast as we could, Jim hanging back to let them know why we had to leave so abruptly. It was a great disappointment.

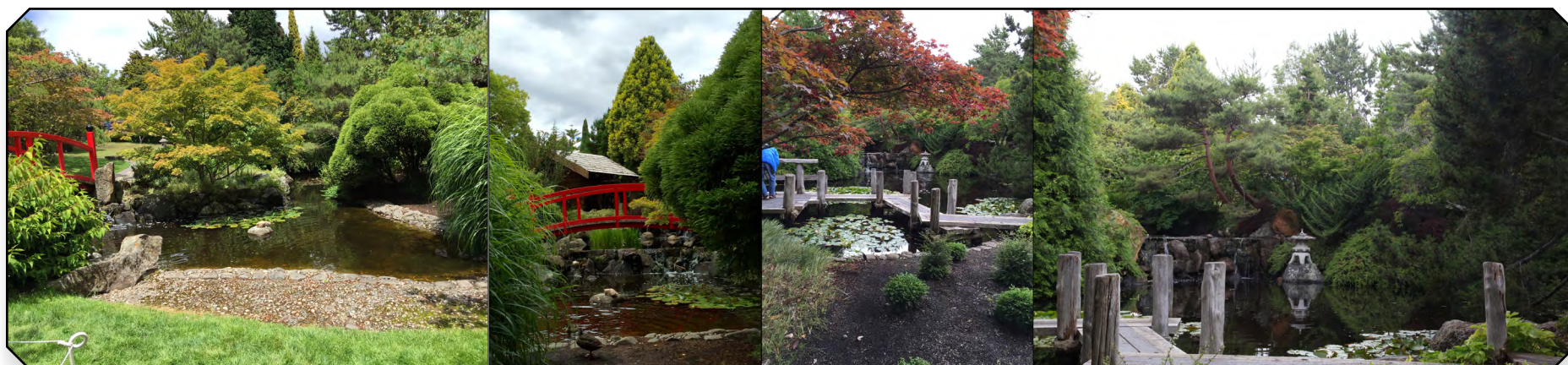
We decided to visit the Botanical Gardens and have lunch there, to make up for such a bad start to the day. Always a pleasurable experience looking at these gardens. The Japanese garden had just been started when we left 20 years ago, and was so well established now.

Orchid house - Beautiful display of Orchids and Begonias here.



The begonias and orchids in the hothouse were stunning in colour and form; in contrast to the tiny, cold Maquarie Island room where wall painting provides a realistic perspective to the short circular pathway, and Peter Cundell's vegie patch is still doing well under the 'new' gardener.

Japanese Garden



The Japanese garden is limited, but has the essential elements of the waterfall, red bow bridge, and contemplation pavilion. Best seen in autumn though.

It took some time to get around the garden, and we hadn't booked lunch. We went to the restaurant and waited in line, hoping we could get in to this rather busy place. We were in luck, and whilst we waited for our lunch Jim took photos from the balcony. Pity we were inside, but grateful to get a meal.



Another brief visit to the Tranmere blocks didn't enthuse Jim, though Hilary was interested in buying two adjacent blocks on the main road, till we discovered the price - far too much for even one. We are discouraged and wonder what to do. Jim doesn't like the dryness here in Hobart, and the rocky hard ground. Even the river view doesn't impress as he thought it may. We went back to the motel to rest for a few hours, and, much to our surprise, Danny, Maria and the grandchildren were at the motel on their way back from a trip south, and wanting to eat there. We joined with them and they paid for our meal, which was very good.

Monday 28th December, Mole Creek Tasmania

We were going to hire a car to take us north, but Karen decided to go up a day early and we travelled together again. The change from the dry Midlands to Perth (TAS) was noticeably greener, and that became striking driving on to Mole Creek set in the beautiful Meander Valley between the Western Tiers and Mt Roland.

Karen booked into the hotel in Mole Creek as she was late to decide. We shared a meal together and then she took us the 5 kilometres up the road to Old Wesley Dale.



Hilary and Jim had already booked this night at Wesley Dale B&B owned by Scott and Deb Wilson. The view from the main road is reminiscent of the Canadian prairie fields - a long paddock of mowed hay speckled by rolled bales, leading the eye to the 1830's double story home. The car enters into a very large, thick-walled fort, used to hold the stock against the local Aboriginals living on the hill top above the house at that time. A delightful homestead with just the one very comfortable converted dairy, all set in exquisite gardens; room after room of them. Jim was in his element.

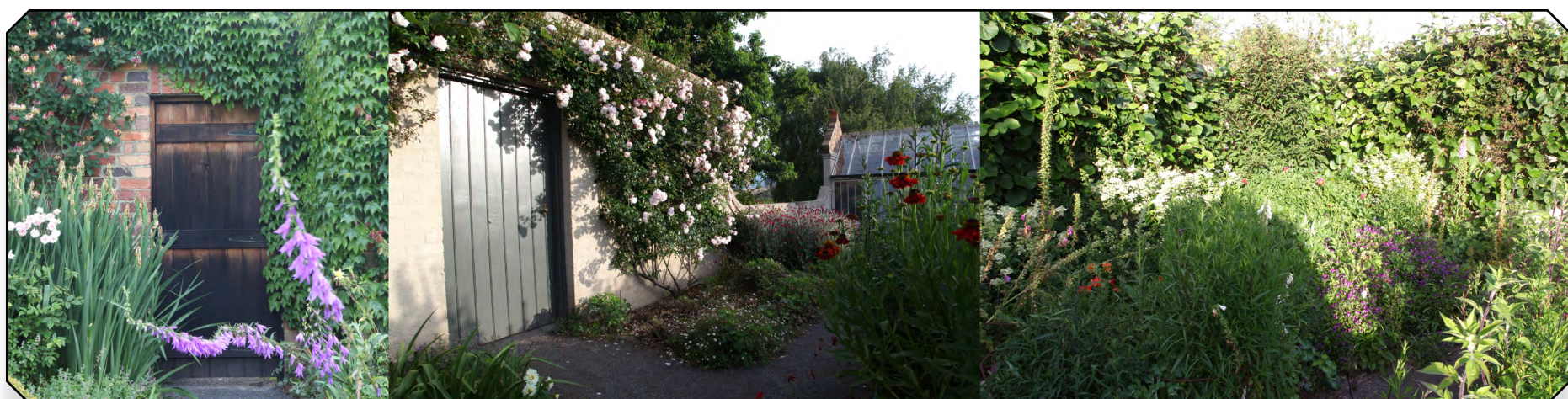
Tuesday 29th December, Mole Creek to Cradle Mountain Tasmania***Old Wesley Dale B&B 1830's***

Our B&B, Old Wesley Dale is a delight, truly a picture book garden of formal low, shaped hedges surrounding packed beds of profuse old cottage flowers and fruit. Much espaliered on the brick walls or along stretched rod supports to form the bed edge. Formal timber doors and latches through the walls lead to more 'rooms' - a picking garden, a formal contemplation seat looking down a pathway to the grove of tall birch trees, a hothouse of tomatoes and fuchsias, a large cage holding two pairs of Macaws, a tower and enclosure housing English hens. A wood storage with a water pump, a small BBQ area. Every turn provides a new perspective and surprise.

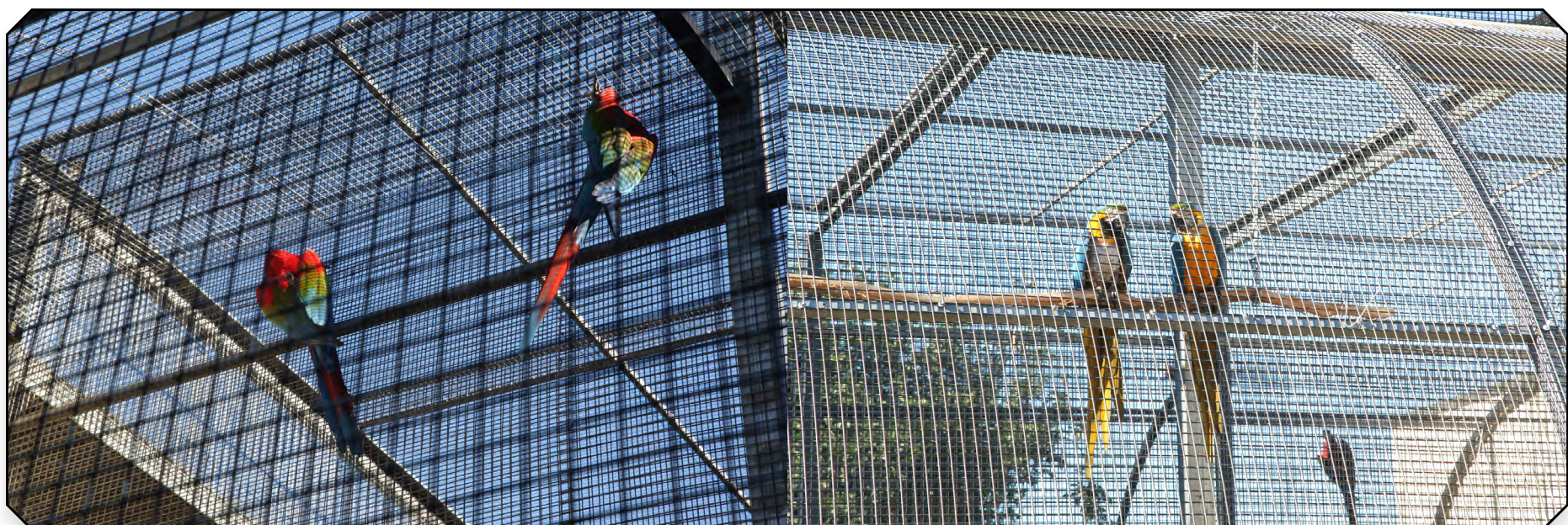
Morning shots of this beautiful place



Our one room dairy converted queen bed/kitchen/lounge is a tasteful recreation of 1830's opulence - deep comfortable arm-chairs, a vase of delightful fresh flowers on a glowing, scarred table showing it's age, but not spoilt by the modern electrics. The small window openings through the thick walls house colourful glass objects.



The veggie garden is set inside the foundation of previous aviaries, and is a very recent addition to the gardening prowess of this remarkable couple. Two pairs of South American Macaws are still part of the family, though this venture is scaling down and the owners want to build another accommodation cottage where the remaining aviary stands now.



Buildings backed against the fort wall in the entrance area; a shed, now housing the cars, several timber storage rooms, and a double-storey barn, which Jim nearly missed seeing until the owner recommended it. The internal roof timbers are wonderfully constructed using pegs rather than nails, though it appears that the corrugated cladding is newer. The thick brick walls are pierced by long vertical slots, wider inside than out to enable easier gun shots.



After a short chat with the owners, we left in Karen's car for Sheffield via Paradise, stopping for field and Mt Roland shots. Unexpectedly, the others also arrived shortly after. Ailene to shoot the murals and Danny/Maria to meet friends for lunch. We came across Ludo Minier (with his lama) a member of the church we attended here in the late 1980's.

Murals in Sheffield, old church in the middle



Another shot of Mt Roland from a spot Ailene took us to on the Forth road, and then to Cradle Mt Caravan Park via Gowrie Park, taking yet more shots.



We all met up again at Cradle Mountain for 2 days. This time we were not all in the same caravan park. Danny and Maria were next door, in a much nicer hut. Hilary located the elusive pathway linking the two parks whilst the others were off looking for good pictures to take, but in the end, we didn't use it.

David, Ailine and Jim left at 5pm for Lake Dove/Cradle, stopping along the way (9km) for shots as well. The scenic boat shed and white sandy beach on the lake provides the most iconic view, so we took many shots here, but the sky was cloudless and would not provide the sunset we wanted. We returned for dinner, but Ailine tried unsuccessfully later anyway.



The cabin is a 2-room+kitchen+shower+toilet, but is very cramped for 3 adults, plus 14 yr and 4 yr children. At the time of booking, Karen wasn't sure if she was coming. It's ideal for a couple, even though there were two bunk beds as well.



That evening, paging through a photo book in Ailine's better cabin, we saw a lovely shot of a timber building called Kate's Hut in the park and wondered where it was. David, aided by Google, found it at the Waldheim car park so we planned to shoot it early.

Wednesday 30th December, Cradle Mountain Tasmania

Ailine's husband David is very supportive of her passion for photography, so Jim set off with them at 4.30am for sunrise shots. This was walk around Dove Lake day. Another clear one and it became quite hot at mid-day. Karen and Jim were ready to go before the others, by 8.45am so set off to shoot Kate's Hut and wait for them. A lovely view in the morning light.

They waited, and then a message came that the car quota was filled – everyone else had to use the buses. As a result, Ailine missed the shot.

Kate's Hut

Almost everyone set off from the car park, but Jim's concerns were soon realized on the short steep walk to the boat shed, when Michael fell. Karen realized that Oscar wouldn't make it, and neither would Maria. So the rest left them there, walking the western shore to the south, and returning on the east.

Jim was very slow, taking many shots, Ailine was a little faster. The others (Danny plus 3 girls) went ahead and returned to the camp by bus. It's a good walk, well made, but still hard work for Jim carrying the 6kg of camera and tripod. Experience has shown him that he needs to use the tripod to eliminate shake, provide a calm look at the scene, and have the same shots at different exposures 'just in case'. The light levels were extreme – very bright on the lake or hills, dark in the bush. From the car park, the hills seem to be almost devoid of vegetation, boring, but magical in it. They caught the bus at 2pm, very tired.

Ailine and David, of course, were out again later for sunset, and again not impressed.

Walking around Dove Lake Cradle Mountain

After dinner we all went across to Danny and Maria after eating, where the children played cards and we adults just talked. It was a much larger lounge area, with a balcony, but being so 'in the trees' would be scary in a bush fire.

This was our last day all together.

Thursday 31st December, Cradle Mountain to Devonport Tasmania

The last day with Karen we drove to Table Cape in Wynyard. The views as we descended to the blue sea were lovely – green paddocks, rolling steep hills dotted with trees and fences, as good as the first time we saw it in 1981.

Looking west toward Table Cape

Table Cape at Wynyard is an old volcano, now farmed for tulips, wheat and potatoes. Very scenic, especially in spring for the tulips. Can't believe we never attempted to see them in the 1980's. A short walk from the lookout on the eastern end, to the lighthouse, but Jim had no time for it. A quick visit in Wynyard to see Karen's old hostel (Kamara) now a church, and a fish lunch on the water, then off to Devonport.

Wheat Fields overlooking lighthouse on Table Cape

On the way to Devonport from Wynyard, Jim wondered how he would feel seeing our old house at Forth, but nothing prepared him for the longing he felt. We sold it in 1998 to Senator Nick Sherry. All the major structures were in place, but they have extended/improved the gardens to a very high level. We were wishing we'd not needed to sell it, though the taxi driver that took us to the airport the next day told us that some outbuilding had been flooded, and the Sherry's had separated. Now we are unsure whether she is still in the house, or whether they sold it to someone else.

Vrede No.1



Jim's first impression was of an estate in southern France. We shot it from across the river then from the road entry, but as we were to leave the following day from Devonport, and it was getting late for Karen to return to Hobart, she tearfully left us at the east Devonport Argosy Motel. It's an old one, but renovated nicely.

A large upstairs ensuite, with a balcony view of the river, provided a very long distance view of the fireworks at 9pm. Jim had no intention of walking the 2km to the headland to shoot that. It was also brief. So we prepared for bed despite others talking on the balcony. At 12am we were awoken by shouts of "Happy New Year", especially loud by some teens, and a much longer fireworks show. It didn't quiet till 1am. Last time we're in a hotel on this particular night!



So, what's next? We are almost ready to send plans for a house on the other part of our Perth block, as a means of getting a sub-division i.e. as proof that it is possible. If that works, we will attempt to sell this house and the other block with plans; or sell a flat we have, to build the new house, and then sell or rent that. But in the long term, we do need to move away. Hilary finds the heat very trying. Where to is yet to be determined.

Back home again 1st January 2016

We arrived home to 34C, a partly scorched garden, one power circuit off, a dirty floor, and beds needing a change. The house sitters were too inexperienced and didn't tell us when things started going wrong. All our white and much of our red grapes were stolen, about \$300 worth of plants died from lack of water when the underwater pump tripped the circuit.

Jim later found that a beloved vase worth approx \$150, bought in Hong Kong in 1988, had been broken and a part carefully placed so we wouldn't notice it. Kitchen drawers were all mixed up and the cutlery drawer was totally awry (sure sign of a big party). Not to mention that the house was a mess from no vacuum power due to the tripped switch, even if they wanted to clean up (which we doubt) with copious dust from what looked like a dust storm. So ends our last holiday until we sort our finances out.

Wednesday, 6th January 2016

We have just got the house back in order.

Jim spoke to a neighbour and it seems that there were cars everywhere for about a week. That must have been some party! They wanted to do something about it, and at least tell us, but were unsure how we would respond. Next time, if there is one, we will give our neighbours full authority to take control of a bad situation. Oh well, the house is still standing.

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