

Memorable trip to Coochin Coochin.....

How lucky with the weather have we been all year on our trips?! And last Friday's visit to Coochin Coochin was no exception. Not only was it a beautiful day but the recent rains meant the countryside was looking its lush green best.

Obviously a popular choice, we had a large group of 50 passengers and, with just a short comfort stop at Boonah, we headed straight for Coochin Coochin Homestead. The present owners, Tim and Jane Bell, were on hand to welcome us and immediately ushered us to the wide verandah and the pretty garden where morning tea was set out ready. The cakes and biscuits were all homemade by Jane and were delicious.

It was fun strolling around the rambling garden and the Wallaby Walk, discovering the trees planted by the many notable guests – including Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, Edward Prince of Wales, the Queen Mother, Agatha Christie, Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh and several Queensland Governors who have enjoyed Coochin's hospitality over the years.

When we were suitably refreshed, Jane gathered us all on the verandah (it was easy to imagine the wonderful dances and parties enjoyed there over the years!) for a little talk on the history of the family and the house. The fascinating thing about Coochin is that it is not a museum – it is a much-loved, comfortable family home. The original homestead is constructed of red cedar throughout but later additions used hardwood structures and pine interiors. After changing hands many times and being reduced from the original 120 000 acres lease to 22 000 acres, Tim's great-grandfather, James Thomas Marsh Bell, with partner Colville Hyde, purchased the freehold for 30 shillings (\$3) per acre in 1882. In 1901 James Bell bought Colville Hyde out and eventually Coochin Coochin was reduced to 850 acres. Originally used as a fattening paddock for James' cattle property at "Camboon" on the Dawson River, the current owners are running Santa Gertrudis Cattle, as well as producing soya beans, lucerne and barley. They are also diversifying into other areas, such as tea tree, hardwood plantations and eel-aquaculture.

We were then free to wander through the house itself and soak up the historic atmosphere. Jane had confided to us that their son, Thomas (fifth generation), was being married there on the Saturday and her future daughter-in-law loved the old house as much as they did and was committed to maintaining it for future generations. A happy thought!

Sadly saying goodbye to the house on the hill, we returned to Boonah and turned off to Kalbar where a very enjoyable roast beef dinner and apple crumble were awaiting us at the Rose Farm. The roses were beautiful but most of us thought a charge of \$2.50 to see them up close was not warranted.

After a short stop at Boonah to look over some antique shops, we headed for Brisbane tired but satisfied. Thanks to our driver, Chris, and thanks to Valerie May for once again doing a grand job of organisation. Wonder what she has in mind for 2006???

Jane James