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Margaret River Field Trip

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Day one

Eighteen conference participants, travelling by mini bus, departed Swanleigh on October 2, 1996. Our driver and guide was Peter Dorrington of Witchcliffe, Western Australia.

Day one was spent travelling to Glenbrook Camp School at Witchcliffe where the group was to stay for 3 nights. We travelled down Highway 1 to Bunbury, then took route 10 to our destination. Refreshment stops were at Mandurah and Busselton.

The camp school hosts, John and Betty Hindle served an excellent meal on the first evening and maintained that high standard throughout our stay. The accommodation was, in all, first rate. We enjoyed a feeling of being well looked after.

Day two

The first tour of the day was to Cloverdale sheep dairy where we met the owners, Debbie and Trevor Dennis, who produce a range of award-winning sheep milk products on site. They gave us a tour of the dairy, explaining the milking process and providing samples of their cheese for tasting. They described and demonstrated their farming focus which is to grow pasture organically using biodynamic techniques. We were impressed with the obvious success of their venture.

The second tour was to Serventy Winery. Here we saw a fully organic winery in operation. Peter Serventy, wine-maker and owner, and one of the pioneers of organic wine production, led the group on an inspection of the vineyards and his wine making operations. We had lunch and wine tasting inside Lyn and Peter's magnificent home – a touch of France with excellent wine and food to make us all feel very pampered.

Day three

Day three and we drove north to the mouth of the Margaret River to begin a tour that was to leave lasting impressions on us all. We were met by Helen O'Brien our tour guide, who spoke with such passion, knowledge and understanding of the area that we knew we were in a special place.



Helen O'Brien explaining the 'bush Tucker' (Photo: Marnie Rowe).

We paddled up the river, looking for the features identified by Helen as historical sites of the early European settlers in the area, the Bussels. We later explored a cave that this family used to store the cheese from their dairy.

We moored on an island covered in an ancient gnarled paperbark forest for a unique lunch. Helen laid out a feast of bush tucker. On a round of bread made with herbs from the local bush, we spread grass tree grub pate, ground cycad nut spread, smoked emu and kangaroo topped with a pickle of rosella like flavour and local fresh herbs. We also had quandongs and other bush fruit flavours to experience.

Helen's knowledge of, and sensitivity to the Aboriginal people who once lived in the area, together with her excellent story telling ability, made our experience on the Margaret River memorable.

(Throughout our time in the Margaret River area we were, as a group, aware that we were close to the site of the recent tragedy that had claimed nine lives in a sandfall. We knew that the locals we were meeting were grieving for lost friends and acquaintances. We also knew that they wished that the tour should proceed as planned. We were grateful for this and appreciated their courage and strength.)

Peter was keen for the group to see as much as possible and found every opportunity to fit in more visits. We stopped to see the abseillers at Bride's Cave, visited the Berry Farm for a magnificent afternoon tea and stood amongst the karris in Boranup Forest.

As well, we had time to explore the local community gardens at Margaret River.

Day four

The tour continued with a visit to the Sustainable Agriculture Research Institute (SARI) on Saturday. This is a small community in Nannup where Jeff Nugent and Julia Boniface live with their families. Jeff and Julia are the authors of *Permaculture Plants – a Selection*.

We arrived in Bridgetown mid-afternoon on Saturday 5 October to conclude an excellent tour. We were grateful to our guide Peter, his wife Jo, and all the other people who contributed to the tour's success. We had gained useful insights into other people's experiences and had learned and been inspired. Furthermore we had developed a strong sense of cohesion in the group and were saddened by the breaking up of the party. An exchange of addresses, collated by Jo Dorrington, helped ease the anxiety we felt and foreshadowed continued communication among us.