

REPORT ON COOLANGATTA ESTATE

SHOALHAVEN HEADS

15 FEBRUARY 2024



39 members today and our driver Malcolm. A dampish morning and the 8 am departure was slightly delayed, plus a quick pick-up in Engadine, but we arrived at Sublime Point for morning tea by 9 am and spent about half an hour there. Despite the drizzle, the spectacular views from this great spot were reasonably clear. Liz's morning tea was delicious as always, and those of us fortunate enough were treated to the rare sight and mimicking sounds of the notoriously-shy lyrebird in the bush just a few metres away (Chris Warner managed this fantastic pic).

Back on the Princes Hwy, we continued south through the outskirts of Kiama, taking the turn off to Gerringong and Gerroa. From there it was 17 km to our Shoalhaven Heads destination. Such a pretty drive and an unbelievably green countryside!

Hillsides of very lush grapevines greeted us, as we entered Coolangatta Estate around 10.45 am. Plus, with all the wineries that we've visited over the years, we've never been fortunate enough to witness grape-harvesting. Today, the hand-picking of Tannat (red) grapes was being undertaken by umpteen people toiling away in the cooler part of the day - starting at 6 am and finishing around 1 pm. On top of the hill, outside the main buildings, our coach was met by Bruno who led us into the convict-built/red cedar lined Great Hall for his talk, a wine tasting and a light deli board lunch to be shared between two.



There is an extensive history, but the estate, named after Coolangatta Mountain which overlooks the area, originated when Alexander Berry arrived from Scotland in 1822 and, with his trading partner Edward Wollstonecraft (from England in 1819), were granted 10,000 acres of land on the Shoalhaven River (the site of Coolangatta Estate) on the condition that they took responsibility for a 100 convicts. As he had earlier received a land grant from Gov Lachlan Macquarie for 2,000 acres, 500 of which were located on Sydney's north shore, Wollstonecraft looked after business in Sydney. Initially, the property grew tobacco, the very profitable Australian red cedar, grains, pigs, cattle and thoroughbred horses. Later mills and workshops were established with ship-building included. The town of Coolangatta in Queensland is named after one of Berry's schooners which was wrecked there in August 1846. Fast forward to the mid to late 1940s when Colin Bishop purchased the property, using it for dairying and a plan to restore the buildings which he achieved by 1972 when he opened the estate as an historic resort. There was doubt about growing grapes so close to the coast, but Colin and his son, Greg, started slowly, planting just one acre of Sav Blanc in the 1980s. Today, it is a 300-acre property with an organic approach and where no fungicide/pesticide is used – quality over quantity. There are also more white wines than red grown here and no blends. For processing, grape bunches are taken by the truckload to Tyrrells Wineries in the Hunter Valley where they are eventually bottled and returned to Coolangatta.

We were able to sample four wines: Coolangatta Estate Wollstonecraft Semillon 2016 (their specialty) @ \$55 a bottle, Coolangatta Estate Verdelho 2022 @ \$35, Coolangatta Estate Rose' Frizzante 2023 (Sweet) @ \$35 and Coolangatta Estate Eileen Chambourcin 2021 @\$60. All wines were available to purchase and many of us did just that. After the deli board lunch, we were given a quick visit to The Vault, once "men only" but now used as a bar area containing an enormous Chubb safe, which was found to be the first Chubb safe in Australia!



It was still cloudy, but fine, whilst we freely wandered around this gorgeous property, enjoying the views, but not allowing curiosity to get the better of us by peering in the windows of any occupied accommodation! Popular for weddings, weekends away, hen's nights etc, the estate offers 26 motel-style rooms located within several heritage-listed buildings.

All too soon, it was time to leave and we headed back the way we came. Being quite a long drive, there was a comfort stop back at Sublime Point with time to again admire the beautiful views here. Lucky Seat Prizes were won by Lesley W and Carole R and we arrived back in Penshurst around 4 pm. A really lovely day, which was almost upstaged by a lyrebird!!