

PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB

MERRIBEE GARDENS, NUMBAA THURSDAY 20 OCTOBER 2020



Helensburgh, the fog set in, being as thick as it gets at the turn off to Sublime Point, making it hazardous to drive in there for our comfort stop. However, this meant that there were no worries about our passengers scurrying off to admire what are usually spectacular views here – it was a whiteout so there weren't any!

At Albion Park Rail, we travelled the new bypass completed early this year at a cost of \$630 million. Malcolm talked about the new Energy Australia's Tallawarra B Power Station nearby which is due to be operational in 2023-2024. It will be Australia's first net-zero emissions plant using a blend of green hydrogen and natural gas and will generate enough energy to power 150,000 homes.

Admiring the hundreds of dairy cattle (perhaps Holstein-Friesian, the best milk-producers) in the gorgeous countryside of Kiama, Gerringong, Berry and Bomaderry and taking the quiet Comerong Island Road along the Shoalhaven River, we arrived at Merribee Gardens at around 10.45 am. Here, we were greeted by Richard Marshall who owns the seven-acre property along with his wife, Lucy. Richard appeared to be the quieter of the two and soon disappeared to continue trimming his much-loved buxus (and there are 10,000 of these) with his adoring dog glued to his side. Having an early start, we were really looking forward to the Devonshire morning tea located in The Barn and headed here first. The Barn and garden is one of the areas on the property popular for weddings and the building holds up to 140 guests, so there was ample room for our group. Together with the welcome cuppa, we thoroughly enjoyed Lucy's homemade scones, together with jam and lashings of thick cream.



From there, we followed her over to 'Mayfield', an old pioneer's cottage, situated amongst their 'Lavender Paddock' which will be blooming from early December. Such a pretty building and also a popular wedding spot. We sat on the verandah while Lucy gave a talk on how the gardens began from the time that the original 2½ acre property was purchased in 2000. For years, the Marshall family including two children, would pop down from Sydney at weekends to do what they could, but with the valuable assistance of a neighbour, horticulturalist/garden designer James Thompson who visualised the layout, the property was slowly transformed and acreage added.



Around two years ago, Lucy and Richard moved here permanently and now have a team of five full-time gardeners. As parts of the gardens suffered damage in the floods earlier this year, they certainly need those extra pairs of hands, plus they have been hosts to hundreds of weddings – this coming weekend, they have three to manage – as well as thousands of visitors.

A tour of the gardens with Lucy followed, before a delicious quiche and salad lunch back in The Barn. Then time to wander, with some of us unable to contain our curiosity and climbing the spiral staircase to the viewing platform. The topiary was spectacular, sadly the lavender not quite ready, but the roses were magnificent. 1400 rose bushes and none are permitted here unless they are scented! So nice to be able to 'smell the roses' again. Every Sunday in October during limited hours, the rose gardens, including the ancient and medieval roses in the Heritage Rose Garden, are open to the public, so we were there at the best time. We boarded the coach at 2 pm and, apart from one heavy shower and more fog, it was an easy return to Penshurst as expected by 4.30 pm.