PENSHURST RSL TRAVEL CLUB

SRI VENKATESWARA HINDU TEMPLE & SYMBIO WILDLIFE PARK AT HELENSBURGH THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER, 2017

Departure was at 8 am from Penshurst, as it was to be a very full day, plus it was going to be a hot one with cloudless skies. One of our regular drivers, Jeff of Pegasus Coaches, would be looking after us.

First stop was morning tea at one of our favourite spots, Sublime Point Lookout at Bulli Tops, and today the views were fabulous, as was Liz's morning tea. She certainly went out of her way to ensure a great spread, considering she was most unwell, and in the end had to miss this trip which she'd organised.

From there, it wasn't far to Sri Venkateswara Hindu Temple where we were required to remove our shoes before walking along the pathway to the entrance. We were expecting to be shown around, but were left to our own devices for perhaps an hour before one of the monks was asked if he could explain a few things and he was more than happy to do so. Interesting and beautiful buildings, but a little run down with water damage etc. Perhaps money is tight, although, according to their website, it is one of the most popular and impressive Hindu temples in the Southern Hemisphere, drawing visitors and Hindu devotees from all over NSW and the rest of Australia. The small, isolated town of Helensburgh may seem like an odd choice for the location of such an important religious landmark, but it was chosen in 1978 as an abode for Lord Venkateswara and Goddess Lakshmi in accordance with Vedic principles, as it met the five requirements for the construction of a Hindu temple. We were to bump into that same monk with his friends at Symbio during the afternoon, when he told us that he'd left home in India at the age of 9, to join the monkhood. What a wrench that would have been, but he appears to love it.

Two minutes down the road was Symbio Wildlife Park, and briefly (taken from their website) it was founded in 1975. It has, for the past 17 years, been operated by the Radnidge family. In their hands, Symbio has become a nationally recognised family-run zoo renowned in the industry for its animal conservation efforts. There was much building work happening, plus the new Symbio Farmyard opened in December 2016. Apart from over 150 farmyard favourites, the park is home to tigers, cheetahs, monkeys, red pandas, meerkats, ring-tailed lemurs along with Australian favourites including koalas, kangaroos, emus, wombats, cassowaries, dingoes, echidnas, reptiles, birds and mini-beasts.

Even though we'd had a large morning tea, it was planned to hold a picnic lunch at Symbio and that was first on the agenda after entry. A sheltered seating area had been booked for us and, although it was a little small for our group, we enjoyed our salad meal which Jenny and Robyn had taken a lot of time and trouble to prepare.

Then time to roam, but it is quite a large area and on a slope, so unfortunately many of us didn't see everything. One of the highlights was the feeding of the meerkats and meeting their new triplets born on 31 August. Only two of them put on a show for us whilst the third hid in a log out of the sun. Photos are on our website, but they don't do these little creatures justice. Absolutely gorgeous and it was hard to drag ourselves away!

The nearby pygmy marmosets were just as cute. The park is still celebrating the arrival of the 15 g twins in September to parents Gomez and Jo. We all remember when thieves broke in to their solidly-built compound and stole three members of the family (including Gomez) late last year. Fortunately, they were found safe and well.

Some of our members just happened to be watching the Sumatran tigers when a wild duck made the unfortunate decision to enter their enclosure for a swim in the inviting pond. Despite desperately trying to get away, it met a sad fate and the pile of feathers at the end said it all. These things must happen all the time in a wildlife park.

We'd returned to Penshurst by around 4.15 pm. Lucky Seat Prizes went to Beryl Bongers and Tom Mullens.