

## A Long Journey to the Land Down Under

By: Cara Hedges

Leaving that Monday morning for the airport was one of the most thrilling, exciting and nerve-racking experiences I have ever had. Up until this point I had never left the country or rode on a plane. Knowing that I was traveling to the other side of the world was a crazy decision that was very meaningful to me. After the many long hours, I arrived in Australia tired but ready to see what was to come.

The first couple of days we stayed on a boat where we got to snorkel on the Great Barrier Reef. We learned about the diversity of the reef and the importance to the many people who live near and work with the reef. This was very eye opening because I did not realize how many different groups of people have an affect on the reef. Between the fisherman, farmers, tourism companies and the environmentalists; there are many who have a reason why the Great Barrier Reef should be protected.

After the reef we went to farm stay and lived with a true Australian family. Not only did I get to see the Australian Tablelands, but I also got to experience the true culture of the people. Over dinner there was non-stop talk about why we were visiting and how they lived their daily life. It was great when we would come across a phrase that was unknown to us like "taking a plunge." We would then have to stop the family to ask what they were referring to and they simply laughed and thought it was strange we did not know it meant "taking a bath." There were many great cultural experiences that I had on the farm and it was probably the most worthwhile cultural experience of the entire trip.

After our time in the Australian Tablelands we traveled to the outback where we were able to see a completely new view of what Australia had to offer. It was here where we got to see Aboriginal art on the walls of caves and learn a little bit of the history of the aborigines. We also visited an old gold mine and was shown the rough life of the miners who lived their life looking for gold. The family that lived at the old gold mine lived about a half an hour from any food stores or civilization for that matter. They had to live on water from their rain barrels and this water source would have to last for up to 7 months before another wet season. Through this trip to the outback I learned that it was a very rough place for anybody to live in.

Leaving the outback was much relief from the hot temperatures, but it was to be replaced by the humidity found in the Daintree rainforest which was a highly diverse ecosystem. The rainforest had so many different species and the importance of keeping the rainforest protected never seemed so clear when Paul O'Dowd spoke to us about it nearly becoming a city. After dinner Paul took us on a night walk where we observed frogs, stick bugs and the many noises of the rainforest. It was a very good chance to have a look at the night life found in the forest. Before leaving the rainforest, I was even able to go zip lining through the jungle to get some amazing canopy views during the day time.

Our humid trip to the rainforest ended and found us in Port Douglas. This is where I was able to experience my favorite part of this trip. We went to the Rainforest Habitat which was basically a wildlife preserve. What I did not know going into it was that I would be surrounded by wallabies and kangaroos without a fence in between. I was able to buy food to feed them and they would walk up and start eating right out of

your hand. When our two hours were up, I was wishing we could stay for the rest of the day. Being able to have such a great interaction with some of the wildlife in Australia really completed my goals for the trip.

Although I was only in Australia for about a month, I had the time of my life. Starting my college career I told myself that I would find a way to go abroad and experience the world. This experience has made me realize that there is more out there to explore and that it must remain preserved and protected if we want future generations to also enjoy our natural resources.

Cows at the farm stay



Aboriginal cave paintings



Looking up into the Daintree rainforest canopy



Feeding a kangaroo

