

## Lismore Visitor Centre To Rotary Park

Depart Lismore Visitor Information Centre turning left along Molesworth Street. Turn right at the 3rd roundabout (crn Woodlark & Molesworth St) into Woodlark Street which flows onto Uralba Street. Turn right at the roundabout at the end of Uralba Street (just after the Lismore Base Hospital). Rotary Park is a 3km Drive from The Lismore Visitor Information Centre.

Saved from destruction by the invasion of exotic vines and weeds, over the years since 1985, Rotary Park is a success story of rainforest restoration. This is a natural 6ha area of dry rainforest dominated by Hoop Pines and giant figs.

The term “dry rainforest” while sounding contradictory, is used to describe a special type of rainforest composed of species which have adapted to cope with seasonally and topographically dry conditions - such as exposed rocky hillsides, shallow soils and “rain-shadow” areas. Its structure is usually simpler than the more luxuriant sub-tropical rainforest which constituted much of the Big Scrub, however in species diversity it is very rich and Rotary Park in particular is significant in having no less than 17 rare or uncommon species.

Although located just 3 kilometres from Lismore CBD and Visitor Information Centre, once in the shade of its canopy it is hard to believe you are in the heart of a busy modern city. On this walk we have tried to illustrate as many of the interesting features as possible. Rotary Park is home to a colony of fruit bats which can be clearly seen & heard from the entrance to the park.

### Boardwalk Entrance

**1** The large Figs shading the entrance and boardwalk were planted by the Rotary Club of Lismore during Rotary’s period of maintenance from 1950 to 1965. This non-local species (*Ficus microcarpa*) occurs naturally in Queensland from Gympie northwards.

**2** Note the sign referring to the seedlings—a rainforest in the making—all planted by birds or other natural processes.

**3** This huge Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrophylla*) probably about 300 years old has great significance for the local Aboriginal people.

**4** Note the erosion gully - this indicates the shallowness of the soil, which is one of the reasons for the occurrence of Dry Rainforest.

**5** In damp weather you may notice an offensive smell in this area. This is caused by Stinkhorn fungi - look for a tall, pointed fungus with a pink net-like veil.

**6** Remains of a large Broadleaved Stinging Tree (*Dendrocnide excelsa*) and Red Kamala (*Mallotus philippensis*). See how the remaining trees and seedlings are responding to the extra light due to the gap in the canopy.

**7** The vine thicket on your right is another example of the filling in of a canopy gap - this time by vines, which often tend to dominate such gaps for many years.

**8** The tall Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) is a typical feature of Dry Rainforest. They are called “emergents” by botanists, as they eventually grow much taller than other Dry Rainforest trees and tower above the canopy.

**9** The next explanatory sign on your right is situated in a soakage area. In the wet season this area is continually damp, which is indicated by the water loving plants, Cunjevoi (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*) the very broad-leaved lily-like plant and *Pollia crispata* the ground cover which looks a bit like a large Wandering Jew. If you look across the gap to the south you will see a large Hoop Pine with a dead top. This tree was struck by lightning in 1990 - another danger for emergent trees.

**10** Another large Moreton Bay with some fine Staghorn Ferns (*Platycerium superbum*) and several species of orchids (*Dendrobium* spp.) on its trunk and branches.

With Hoop Pine, these are the two main “emergents” of this forest.

**11** The dead trees with axe marks in this area are Privets (*Ligustrum lucidum*) which have been deliberately killed. This exotic is a major weed of rainforests and can very quickly dominate the second layer, producing abundant seedlings which suppress natural regeneration.

**12** A large canopy gap. With management, the natural balance can be restored, allowing re-colonisation by native species. Details are on the sign.

**13** You will notice a decrease in light levels at this spot - due to an increase in canopy density. Increased moisture levels and better soil have produced almost a sub-tropical rainforest in this small area.

**14** Note the giant Maidenhair (*Adiantum formosum*) on your left. This is a typical fern of Dry Rainforest, appreciating high light levels. As you will have noticed, Dry Rainforest has few ferns and few groundcover plants. The forest floor is very open and leaf litter can be sparse in the wet season and much heavier during dry periods - many Dry Rainforest species have the ability to shed leaves under drought stress.



**15** Creek crossing - note the giant buttress fig root sculptured by the water flow. Follow this root to its source - it is larger than the tree to which it belongs! Ponder on the rock lodged in the tree - how did it get there and when? The spread of urban development and interruption to natural drainage dramatically increases the flow of this stream in heavy rain thereby increasing erosion and siltation of its bed. Exotic weeds and household rubbish are also introduced along the creek line. The track turns sharply here and heads downstream along the opposite slope - notice the increase in the number of epiphytes - flowering orchids may be observed in the canopy during September and October.

**16** On your right towards the creek is another fig - note the large bracket fungi on its trunk. This is a sign of decay or terminal illness in the tree.

**17** The brilliant orange leaves carpeting the ground here during most seasons belong to the Green Native Casca-rilla (*Croton verreauxii*).

**18** The tall, reed like plant is another Aroid (*Gymnostachys anceps*), known as Settler Flax.

**19** This area was once a sea of lantana mixed with Asparagus and Madeira Vine Exotic weeds). Although this is a particularly large site it is regenerating well, the main colonizer being Poison Peach Bush (*Trema aspera*) and *Polia crispata*.

**20** This is the site of the demise of a large Fig. Blown down in about 1980, the trunk has almost disappeared, broken down by the forests recycling organisms - a demonstration of the dynamics of the rainforest.

**21** In this area, giant vines are conspicuous. These large woody climbers are known as Lianas and reach their best development in the warmer rainforests, colonising clearings or canopy gaps. Fifty four species of vines have been identified in Rotary park, among the most numerous being Native Grapes or Water Vines, (*Cissus antarctica*, *Cayratia* spp.) and bower Vine, *Pandorea jas-minoides*, Native Derris, *Derris involuta* and the blood Vines, *Austrosteenisia* - two species.

*Aristolochia praevenosa* food plant for the rare Richmond Birdwing Butterfly also occurs here.

**22** Another beautiful Hoop pine - note the single vine stem twining its way up the trunk, This is the stem of a Corky Prickle Vine (*Caesalpinia subtropica*), flowering and fruiting in the canopy. If you venture off the track further along, you may come to grips - literally - with its climbing mechanism - viciously sharp, curved prickles on the stems and foliage. The older stems have prominent longitudinal flanges of cork.

**23** The sparseness of the canopy hereabouts is due in part to the invasion by Large Leaved Privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*). Now that these exotics have been removed, the forest has been opened up, allowing more light to penetrate.

**24** In the area around you are several rare species, notably the Crisped Silkpod (*Parsonsia lilacina*), northern Clematis (*Cematis fawcettii*), Axebreaker (*Geijera paniculata*) and *Diplospora cameronii*, recently rediscovered in Lismore after over fifty years.

**25** At this last station on your guide, look right to a dense stand of varying age, regenerating Hoop Pine. The area on your left was in 1985, probably one of the heaviest infestations of Madeira Vine, Asparagus and Wandering Jew - now a success story of restoration.

**When exploring our nature reserves and national parks, please ensure that you take adequate water, wear appropriate footwear and apply sun protection.**

For further information please contact:

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# Rotary Park Rainforest Walk



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