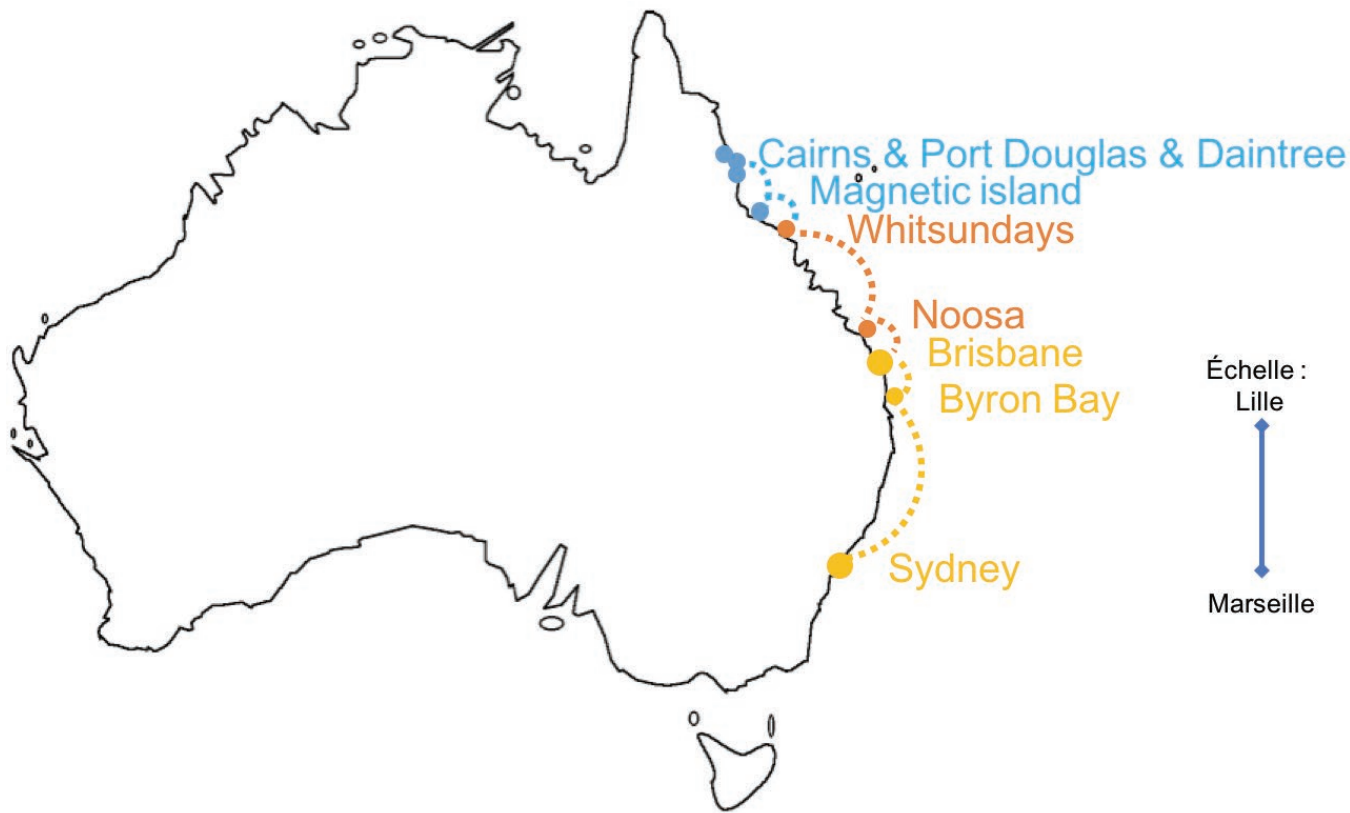




Curiosix

AUSTRALIE
- Été 2017 III -



My last newsletter left you wandering a heavenly beach in the Whitsundays. Since then, I journeyed to Magnetic Island. The isle is thusly named ever since the Cook expedition's compass started misbehaving coming closer to the island. They incorrectly assumed that it had magnetic properties. The East coast is scattered with landmarks of Cook's travel misfortunes. The more I hear about those, the more I am starting to question his true contribution to Australia's history. Locals revere him as the explorer that discovered the continent but it seems that

during the past two centuries before his coming many people dropped by already. This landlubber even ran his ship into the barrier reef! What a noob. Although, what explorer did not know any pitfall? He whom we name the greatest European seafarer still managed to keep his whole crew healthy throughout the world and to map the East Australian coast - so that two hundred and fifty years later I can come and bask in the sun.

While hiking in the eucalyptus forests in Magnetic Island, I made random encounters with wild napping koalas, with joeys on their backs. As I climbed dry river beds, I chanced upon rock wallabies. In the morning, I had deserted creeks for my personal enjoyment, my handstands on the beach being only disturbed by a whale and its calf jumping near the shore.







After that, I stood quiet under the equatorial sun for several days between Cairns, Port Douglas and Cape Tribulation. When I say quiet, I mean it: first dive and first flight! Having survived the mortal poisons of the tropical flora, escaped from the fatal bite of the crocodiles, resisted the tourists as well as the snorers, I was on a lucky streak.

Plunging into the abyss, I explored the depths of the Great Barrier Reef. This living structure (coral is an animal!) stretches 1,400 miles all along the Australian coast. Contrary to what I naively thought, it is not at a continuous wall that stands against the Pacific. Quite the reverse, it is a necklace on which the coral atolls slip like pearls. Everyone knows - with the notable exception of representatives seating in Cambera - this underwater monument is dying because of warming water temperatures and cyclones that devastate it. Bleaching affects two-thirds of the northern part and progresses rapidly to the south. If you want to come visit Nemo, hurry up: even today you can only dive on the most outer reefs.

In spite of the good health of the Agincourt reef where I dived, I was very surprised: the colors are far from being as saturated as the pictures that we are used to see everywhere. The corals appear to us greyish and it is only by approaching within a yard or two that one begins to perceive the colors of anemones, algae and other organisms living in symbiosis with the coral. On the other hand, the fishes form schools of vibrant turquoise, yellow, red, orange and purple. It's gorgeous! The seabed impressed me: I did not expect this type of landscape at all. As I swam amid the canyons, I passed over a shark but I was the largest.

I was not afraid at all to jump off the plane, however the idea of breathing through a tube seemed really absurd and I was pretty sure that I would forget to inhale at some point. Luckily the instructor had this Kiwi charm which easily draws you into the depths - unless you are Ulysses of course. Under the surface, such serenity, such silence!



If you're looking for a noisier sensation, you can still attempt the plunge at 15,000 feet into the void. The free fall sensation was incredible. The resistance of the air really confers the impression of flying. Amidst mountains, between the tropical forest and the ocean, above the rivers, the landscape boosted the adrenaline of my jump. Unfortunately, at some point it was necessary to open the parachute and it suddenly became less funny as it whirled in every direction. Next time, I'll do it without the parachute!

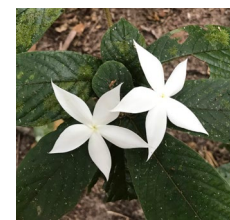
A dense tropical forest scene with numerous trees and thick foliage. Many trees have long, thin, light-colored vines hanging down from their branches. The leaves are various shades of green, and the overall atmosphere is lush and overgrown.

DAINTREE



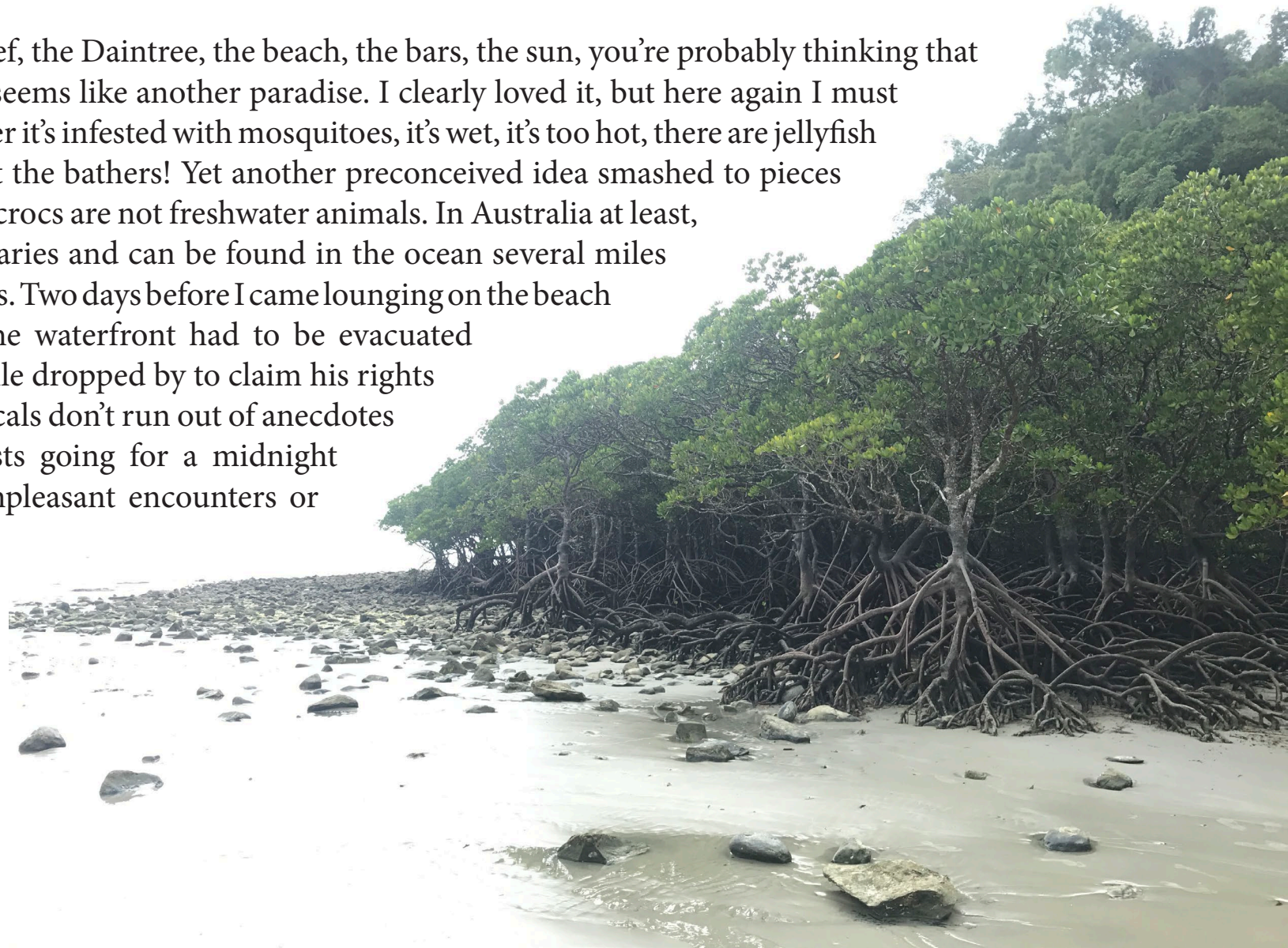
Less famous although listed as World Heritage, northern Queensland is also home to the Daintree: one of the oldest rainforests in the world! This splendid cathedral of greenery unveils an exciting ecosystem. All the trees intermingle and shape powerful networks. Lianas take the elevator by clinging to the young shoots and being pulled up as the tree grows. A bit less passive, some palm tree species throw thorny tentacles on surrounded branches and fight their way towards the light. Orchids just use the trunks as support without competing for resources (they are epiphytes - the opposite of parasites). A peculiarity of rainforests is that they extract their water mainly through their canopy by absorbing moisture from the clouds. It's lush, it's exciting, it's majestic. But guess what? It's dying! Australia now ranks like Brazil in terms of destroyed forest area per year.





During my peregrinations, I discovered a new animal. Like me, I assume that you probably never heard of it, but it really does exist: the cassowary. Despite being a rare and endemic species of Australia, it does not enjoy the same heavy marketing as its fluffy koala and kangaroo buddies. His physical disgrace is aggravated by the reputation of being quite dangerous. Enormous ratite (birds that don't fly like emus and ostriches), it has the same legs as the velociraptor and adorns its head with an impressive mohawk. I had the chance to see one close up (I unfortunately could not take its mugshot so you get a Wikipedia picture).

The great barrier reef, the Daintree, the beach, the bars, the sun, you're probably thinking that north Queensland seems like another paradise. I clearly loved it, but here again I must warn you: in summer it's infested with mosquitoes, it's wet, it's too hot, there are jellyfish and... crocodiles eat the bathers! Yet another preconceived idea smashed to pieces during my trip: the crocs are not freshwater animals. In Australia at least, they delight in estuaries and can be found in the ocean several miles away from the shores. Two days before I came lounging on the beach of Port Douglas, the waterfront had to be evacuated given that a crocodile dropped by to claim his rights to sunbathe too. Locals don't run out of anecdotes about drunk tourists going for a midnight dip and making unpleasant encounters or inhabitants who get eaten when attempting to rescue their dog from the fangs of a swimming handbag.



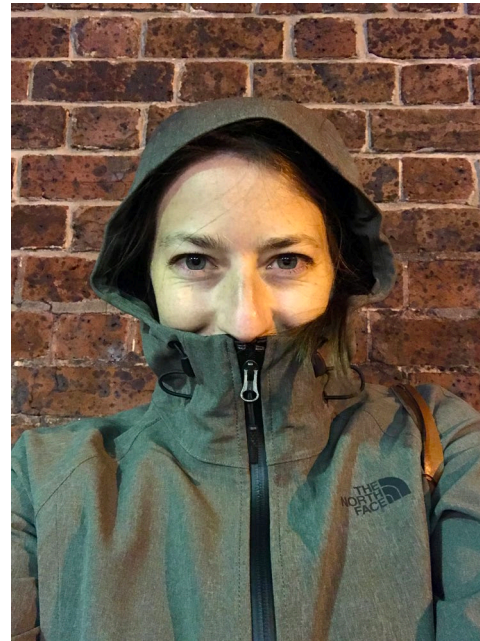


Sometimes I make choices that astonish me. I left Cairns and the tropics and arrived in Melbourne this morning... it is c-c-chilly. The first thing I did was to buy pantyhose and pull my jacket from the depths of my backpack. It had not had its share of the trip so far, it will be my faithful companion henceforth!

Tomorrow the holiday ends. I am not leaving Australia just yet though: I will work from Melbourne and Sydney this week. Internet being rather awful in Australia and the cafes closing at 4pm in Melbourne, I probably will not make table turns. The week begins rather well however: this Monday is a public holiday in the US!



Hier encore
- Cairns -



Aujourd'hui
- Melbourne -