

TO: Mareeba Shire Councillors

DATE: 3 April 2024

RE: Anzac Park, Kuranda (AKA Rotary Park, Botanical Garden, Hidden Jewel, Green Jewel)

https://www.kurandapaper.com/_files/ugd/f0cb2f_eb5c8158097d40afa538315387bb2c3f.pdf

<https://kurandaregion.org/anzac-park-kuranda/>

Welcome to the new councillors and welcome back to the old ones :-)

I am assisting here in Kuranda with a grant for Indigenous Tourism and we have an artist hub / retail space in the Kuranda Heritage Markets (just outside of Kuranda Birdworld). As a volunteer I 'man the stall' on two days every week. This has led me to having to walk through the 'garden' to get to and from the carpark to the markets on these days – since November 2023.

Prior to Anzac Park – the 'botanical garden' - being raised by council mid to late last year I had only very occasionally walked through it over the years I have lived in Kuranda. When I first moved to Kuranda (2008) I didn't know much about the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area rainforests, Indigenous people, wild river riparian zones, council planning, etc but through being fortunate enough to volunteer with local organisations I have learnt a lot :-D

The consultation about the garden with council ended last year with our conservation groups being allowed to add layered plantings, in particular epiphytes, to enrich the botanical garden. The fountain would be removed and the new car parks would not be built as planned. There was also talk about removing the pavers and replacing the paths with concrete and top dressing the grass area to improve the grass growth, and replace the picnic tables and make them more accessible for wheelchairs, etc.

Kuranda is a tourism village – we open at 10 and close by 3-4pm. The train and skytrail arrive and depart on time bringing travellers from all around the world to spend a couple-few hours here walking around checking out the wildlife attractions, retail shops and nature walking trails. They will buy food and beverage, and souvenirs for family and friends. Of course the Barron Falls is a BIG attraction and as most people arrive in Kuranda by train or skyrail they get to see it on their way up on their 'day trip'.

Kuranda 'Village in the rainforest' has been a tourist attraction for over 100 years in various iterations. It has always been a popular spot due to the Barron Falls viewing access and rainforest walking trails – and the railway which was built in 1891.

Kuranda Fig Tree Avenue: *Kuranda is a small hinterland town approximately 19 km northwest of Cairns in Far North Queensland. The avenue of mature fig trees which line the main street of Kuranda, Coondoo Street, were planted by the Woothakata Shire Council in the early 1930s to beautify the street and enhance the town's appeal to visitors. The trees were planted at a time when Kuranda was experiencing exceptionally high tourist numbers. Kuranda was, and continues to be, one of Queensland's most popular tourist towns.[1]*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuranda_Fig_Tree_Avenue

In 1930's the figs (Kuranda Fig Tree Avenue) were planted in the main street because they knew they would be awesome old-growth figs one day. They are now well established at ~90 years have plenty of secondary epiphyte growth planted by birds and insects, ie. ferns, mosses, orchids, etc., they are becoming quite stunning. There is a plan afoot with council to add 'fairy' lights to the fig garden beds to add more 'special effects' for night time trading. Should be EPIC and will hopefully stimulate more night time trading events throughout the year. The figs are a natural and very beautiful, 'free' attraction / asset for our village.

Today I was speaking with Melissa in the Kuranda Heritage Markets – her father built that market 'back in the day' - she tells me that all the property owners are responsible for their nature strips – to keep them maintained with pretty plants and removal of dead vegetation, etc. Things grow quickly here in the rainforest – particularly the grass and weeds – except for the trees which grow slowly ;-)

We need a dedicated garden team who are enthusiastic about Wet Tropics native vegetation with a bit of flair and a tourism focus. All of the CBD verges and garden beds need to be converted to native vegetation only and the responsibility to look after them should not be the property owners, at their own expense, as the land belongs to council. All the weedy plants that come from other rainforests around the world need to be removed before they take over. New rare and threatened species of Wet Tropics plants should be added. We are surrounded by WTWHA and our village should reflect the values of being in a WHA. The rubbish dropped during the day needs to be picked up first thing each morning – like a proper tourism village anywhere else in the world :-). This will save it ending up in our waterways when it rains and gets washed down our drains into rivers and streams.

Jim Mealing (original markets builder) was the Rotary Club president and was there when the fountain was put into Anzac Park in the late 1980's. On reflection, as I walk through the park, even though it is no longer working and in a decrepit crappola state, with the attendant stories of people swimming and urinating in the pool (not necessarily at the same time), I can still see what the Kuranda community intended back then with the overall design. The fountain and pool are supposed to mimic the magical rainforest waterfalls and swimming pools that many of us have been fortunate to have visited and enjoyed – see photo below. On a hot day when you walk through the park I could imagine the fountain gently flowing and a light spray turning it into a natural airconditioner. I can imagine that we add a bunch of ferns, mosses and other plants that live along our waterways so that day trippers can enjoy a sense of being deep in a proper rainforest.



https://live.staticflickr.com/3352/3475329545_9b8a31a77f_b.jpg

The botanical garden is the only 'natural' park in the Kuranda CBD that is readily accessible by tourists. I have seen a tour guide with a group of 20 older people off their bus walking through the park pointing out the various features in the garden.

The story goes that the botanical garden was planted out by the community with a grant from the SAP program:

"In early 1988 the re-elected Labor Government announced it would implement it's Structural Adjustment Package (SAP) in order to address any negative impacts associated with the World Heritage Listing."

To further the previous generation's intention:

1. Create a land title for the 'botanical garden' so future generations don't mistake it for 'road reserve' and try to turn it into carparks again. Oh yes it will happen, again :-)
2. Invite Cairns Botanical Garden volunteers to visit us at the site and give our community groups advice, suggestions, etc.
3. Create internal village marketing campaign for the botanical garden to be included on future maps and to link with visitor walking trail designs.
4. Create botanical signage for the trees. DRAFT plant register:
<https://kurandaregion.org/content/uploads/2023/07/Anzac-Park-Botanical-Garden-Flora-Register-DRAFT-V1.pdf>
5. Signage for animals that may be observed in the park. DRAFT animal register:
<https://kurandaregion.org/content/uploads/2023/07/Anzac-Park-Botanical-Garden-Fauna-Register-DRAFT-V1.pdf>

Below: Outline of proposed title in pink, the botanical garden is adjacent the Kuranda Heritage Markets and existing carpark.



I think the fountain should be retained but modified to remove the pool and just leave the vertical wall making it a 'water feature' with a grate drain at the bottom to recycle the water – see photo below. The rocky wall can be planted out with stunning native vegetation of ferns, mosses, etc - and people will stand in front of it to get their photo taken. I've seen that – on numerous occasions – people standing in front of the figs on the main street to get their photo taken in front with the fig-fairy-garden behind them. Yep for sure. If you come here from a big city chances are you have never, ever seen anything like that in your life and they are quite spectacular if you stop to take a proper look.

To this end, we need to hire a specialist to give us a new design idea and quote for the refurbishment of the fountain to create a 'water feature'. To my recollection, during the consultation, the removal of the fountain was already a *fait accompli* because it's been in the too hard basket for too long at council, ie. broken down, derelict, etc. so removal seemed like the obvious solution, I guess. However, the last generation of Kuranda locals bequeathed this 'water feature' to the botanical garden and future of the Kuranda Village, and I feel I would be remiss to not re-address the removal of this fountain now.



https://scontent.fbne9-1.fna.fbcdn.net/v/t39.30808-6/421090173_10164435823559619_8472400793243697390_n.jpg?_nc_cat=110&ccb=1-7&_nc_sid=5f2048&_nc_ohc=cxgNNSak1soAX-FVF8k&_nc_ht=scontent.fbne9-1.fna&oh=00_AfDOyy2lg1YPbBxgx6Oyu-ojXZLFcrUzpPDAZneKq7LyA&oe=6612B367

To be honest when we were standing there during the consultation last year I don't think anyone gave the fountain much thought but I wonder what Jim Mealing would make of it if he was still with us – such a shame our village assets can't be repaired and maintained over the generations :-)

As far as I know – the demolishing of the fountain has been approved and awaiting the works. We would need a 'stop work' on this job asap to rethink the removal and to consider designing and creating a 'water feature'.

Thank you for your reading time and consideration with our local park / garden.

Kind regards,

Jo Martin

for Kuranda Region Planning Group

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