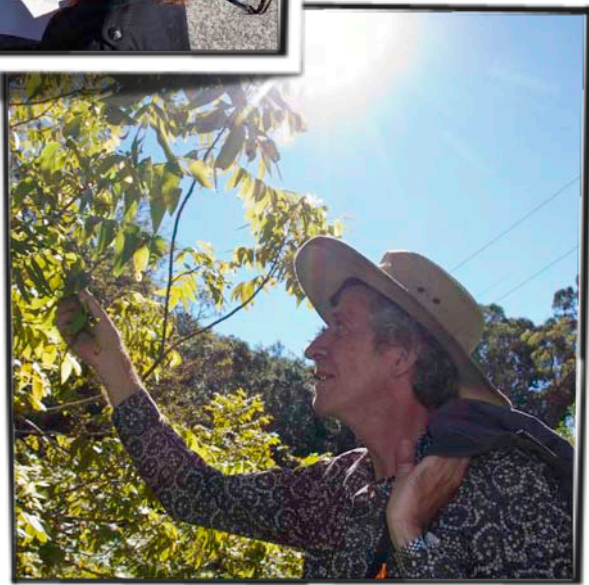


Russ Grayson

Australasian Permaculture Convergence 11 — Aotearoa/New Zealand 2012

RESILIENCE by DESIGN



Resilience by design

EVERY TWO YEARS or so, permaculture practitioners from the Oceania region come together to meet, talk, review, plan and to catch up with each other.

They do this at the Australasian permaculture convergences and, for the permaculture milieu as well as for the permaculture design system as a social and design movement, these events are important in creating the bonds that tie geographically dispersed practitioners together.

Such was the Australasian Permaculture Convergence number 11—APC11—in New Zealand in the southern Autumn on 2012.

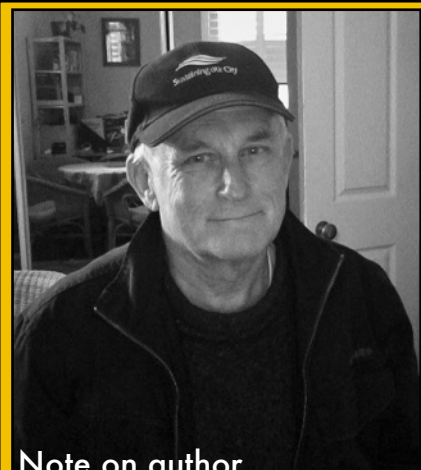
The venue had been chosen by a vote by participants at APC10 at Kuranda, Far North Queensland, in 2010. A vote was needed because there was a choice of two venues on offer—New Zealand and coastal south-east Queensland. The previous permaculture convergence, APC9, had taken place in Sydney.

New Zealanders organise their own national convergences which they call by the Maori term, 'hui', and there are international convergences at more or less regular intervals, the first of which took place at Pappinbarra, on the subtropical mid-north coast of NSW in 1984.

No venue for APC12 was chosen at APC11. This will be decided when people are ready to move on it, either by those in a region volunteering to host the event or by a deliberative process online.

APC11: <http://apc11.co.nz/>

More on permaculture: <http://permacultureaustralia.org.au/>



Note on author

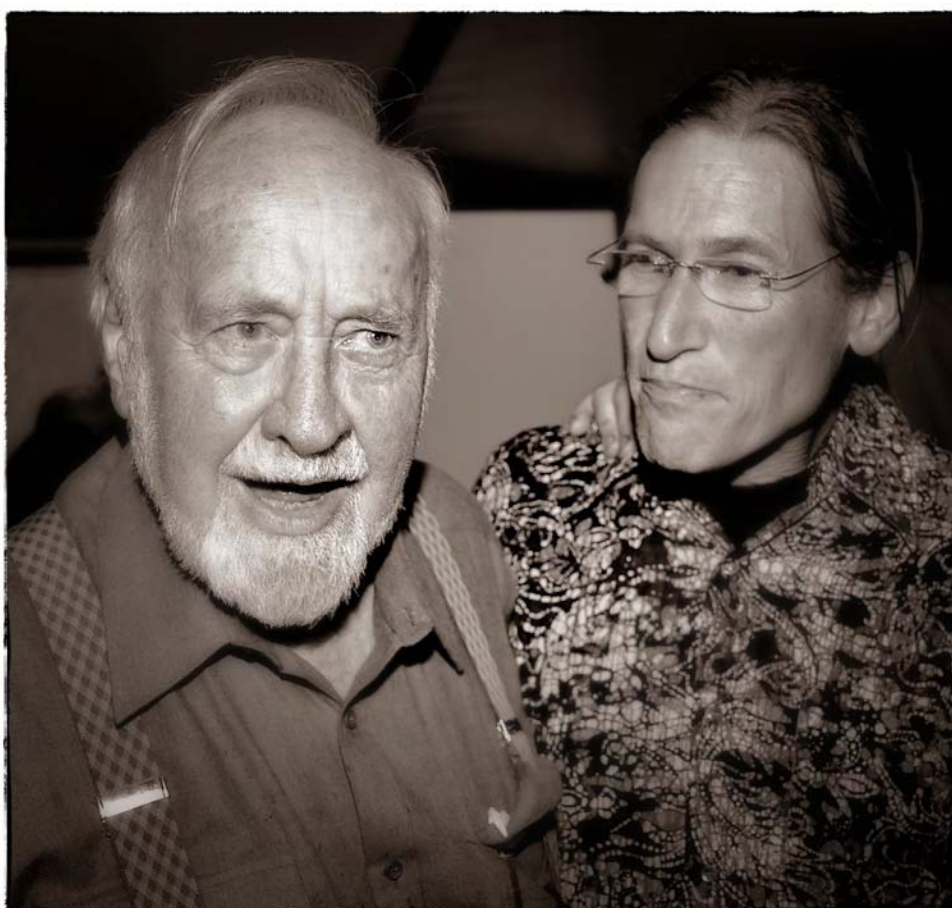
Russ Grayson first encountered permaculture while living in Tasmania in the late 1970s, attended the first international permaculture design convergence in NSW in 1984 and completed Robin Francis' first permaculture design course in 1985.

With Fiona Campbell he organised and taught an urban permaculture design course for a decade and served on the board of directors of Permaculture International Ltd (now Permaculture Australia).

He consults to local government on community food systems, is media liaison for the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network and is affiliated with the TerraCircle Inc international development consultancy.

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In the beginning...

Co-founders of the permaculture design system, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren.

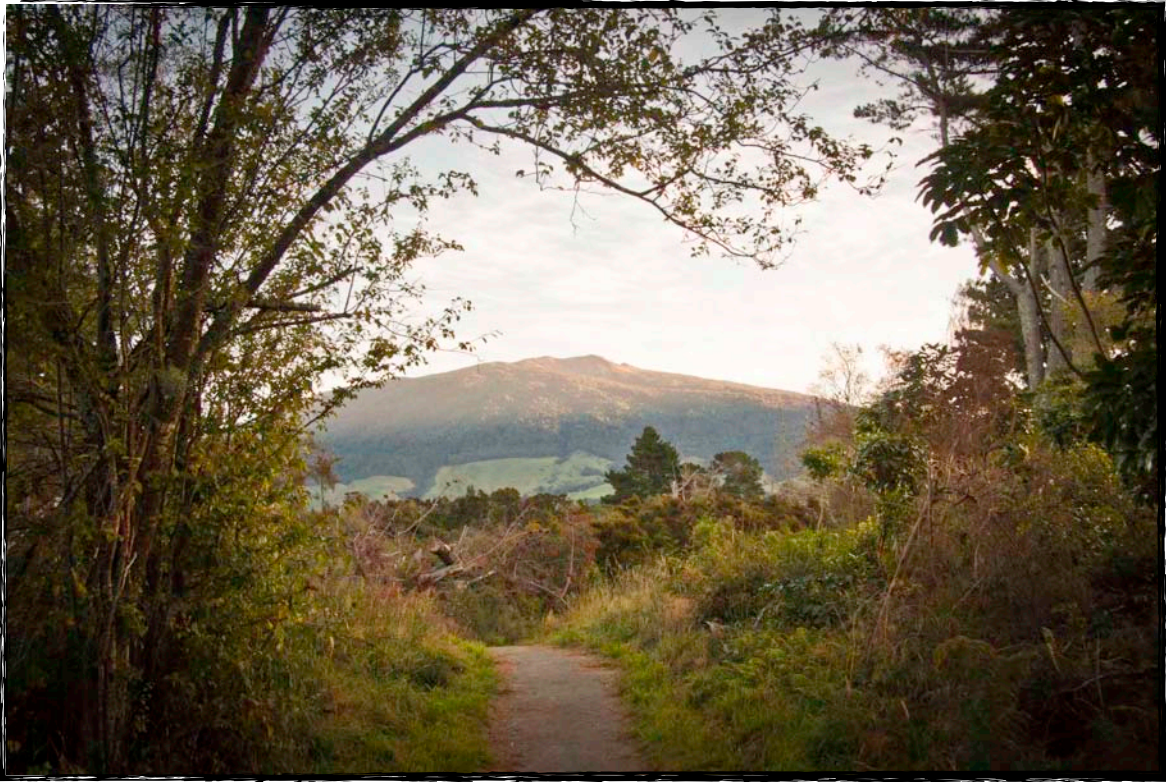
While living in Tasmania Bill and David collaborated on formulating permaculture, infusing their own ideas with the innovative ideas in circulation at the time.

The first easily accessible description of the permaculture design system appeared in *Permaculture One*, published in 1978. *Permaculture Two*, a development of the idea, followed around a year later.

The 1980s brought steady growth in the number of people practicing permaculture and a broadening in access to permaculture design and introductory courses.

The decade of the 1990s was one of dramatic growth in numbers, a phenomenon too of recent years.

Permaculture ideas are applied in different ways, as became obvious to those attending APC11.



TURANGI...

Today... APC11.
Yesterday... a walk along the banks of the Tongariro
Well made track past a riverbed of smoothed stones
And cold water moving fast
Fishers after trout stand in stream
Lines dangling hopefully
Of a tasty meal
Walkers getting their day's exercise.

Then across a suspension footbridge to the opposite bank
Where the river curves to cut deeply
An old tree's fuzz of moss lit by the setting sun
That paints the trees in yellowshifted light
Before the onset of evening
Here on this riverbank
Below which the waters run rapid.

Wide fields and isolated farmhouse
Lines of poplar devoid of leaf
Distant range, its corrugations sidelighted in detailed relief
Long shadows across the land
The sun setting behind a mountain
Casting misty yellow shafts to silhouette other peaks
In golden glow
While above the scanty clouds turn pink and orange.

A steady climb along the top of high fawn cliffs
That fall straight into the river
And, cresting the tops...
Backed by cliff and peak
There in the distance
The shining waters of Taupo stretch across the horizon
Like a revelation opening this land.

Suspension bridge, Tongariro River, Turangi



The setting

TURANGI is a small town on the main north-south highway that connects Auckland to Wellington. It's so small that you can reach anywhere in town on foot. There's no bus, no taxi.

The town occupies flat terrain and is defined by the curve of the Tongariro River, which drains Lake Taupo a few kilometres to the north. Take a walk along the well-used walking track—it's some kilometres in length and is generally flat, easy walking—that follows the river banks and you can swap sides via a pedestrian suspension bridge near the town. Along the way you meet townsfolk—walkers, the occasional runner, people exercising their dogs and themselves. Look over to the river are you find trout fishers dotted along its length—this, surely, is hyperlocal food, river-to-plate direct.

The river speeds over a bed of large stones worn round by the season's cascades. It's a shallow stream with the occasional rapid and is deepest where the gushing waters have cut a deeper channel into the streambank where it makes its curving turns. If I say that it's a braided stream, those with a rudimentary knowledge of

physical geography will understand.

Other than the enjoyment of rapid movement along a bush track, the simple pleasures found along the way are the occasional opening of the streambank vegetation to reveal views along the river to not-so-distant mountains and, of evenings, the way the setting sun's yellowshifted light illuminates the riverside trees.

And unfamiliar trees these are to Australians—they include autumn's yellow foliage on the silver birch now busy shedding its leaves and the cabbage tree with its tufts of stiff, pointed leaves. Then there are the more familiar, eucalypt and radiata pine which is grown as a commercial forestry crop in large plantations in the Taupo district.

Just before the riverside trail joins the footpath along the highway at the end of town, it makes a steady but none-too-strenuous switchback climb to the top of fawn-coloured, vertical cliffs that fall directly to the Tongariro. These are perhaps the most visually spectacular of the river's offerings, the rest being more subtle in appreciation.

Encounter

We had bought a few fruit and veges at the grocery earlier in the day (they sell those oval-shaped African cucumbers with blotchy yellow-green skin with spikes) but after they had closed we ventured into the supermarket in search of a bottle of NZ wine (Kim Crawford 2010 Hawke's Bay merlot, a nice drop from the east coast of the North Island over near the Art Deco town of Napier). The good news was that it was on sale.

New Zealand supermarkets are just like Australian supermarkets, which are just like North American supermarkets, which are remarkably like British supermarkets... and so the similarity continues. If there's one thing these foodlike product warehouses have done it is to homogenise and globalise the industrial shopping experience. Not all was similarity, however. I've seen no mainland Australian supermarkets with a tank of living shellfish (mussels) kept fresh and alive by being continuously sprayed with water. And Sydney supermarkets do not have an alcoholic beverages section.

But it wasn't shellfish or local wine that was the chance encounter in New World. It was someone from Sydney's Eastern Suburbs, someone who lives not all that far from us. He had just arrived in town and set up tent at the local backpackers' lodge. Now, he was hunting food, something not all that surprising given his energy-consuming mode of transport all the way from Auckland...

Encounter (continued)...

Transition Bondi's Lance Lieber had made the journey south by bicycle, having carted the thing all the way from Bondi to Auckland. From that city on a peninsula—it has both a west and east coast—he set off last Saturday, arriving in Turangi yesterday, Tuesday. His comment about a country of hills seemed to come from direct and very recent experience of its terrain.

Lance looked a little tired and worn, an impression reinforced by the gravel rash on knees and hand, the result of repeated topplings from the bike when he pulled onto the roadside gravel to let trucks pass. His partner Beatrice need not worry, however, for he's a quietly tough character and is none the worse for his evident wear.

We left Lance to go get some much-needed sleep.



Lance Lieber

Extinct volcano at sunset, Turangi



The town

As I said, Turangi is a small town and I suspect much of whatever wealth it manages to harvest comes from visiting trout fisherfolk. I'm told there are rainbow trout which do not require restocking as they have established a breeding population and have been exported to restock a river in North America where they originated. Then there's brown trout which, so the story goes, is a Tasmanian import that, like the rainbow, has been sent back to its island of origin to assist restocking.

A visit to the town's commercial centre reveals a venue too scattered and unfocused to serve more than a utilitarian function. The most people we saw yesterday were in a large grassy park on the edge of the commercial centre where they relaxed in the warm sun while their children were in the playground.

There's a couple art galleries, a single cafe that was doing good business, a general store selling fruit, veges and other foods, an outdoor shop selling fishing kit and other minor shops in an open arcade largely devoid of people. Down the road is a pizzeria and bar next to the New World supermarket, which was far busier than the town centre. Was this, I wondered, an example of how supermarkets pull people away from traditional shopping centres with their small businesses so that they lose their vitality? Had the supermarket been located in the commercial centre, at least it might have populated the arcade area and benefited small businesses.

I'm told that Turangi is a town of have-and-have-nots. If so, it must be hidden... the houses we walked past were neat with well-mown lawns and there was no obvious sign of need. Nonetheless, this came from people in the know and so must be taken as fact. Attached to the police station fence was a large sign about domestic violence and I wondered if this had anything to do with what we had been told about the place. There was an air about the town that marked it as different to other, more vital centres we passed through.

APC11

The convergence starts in a couple hours over on the other side of town at the Te Kura o Hangi Maori school (it's school holidays here), and there's the traditional start-of-convergence dinner tonight. And just in time for the first day the warm sunny weather and blue skies have swapped for the grey of overcast and a noticeable decline in temperature. The organizers did say to bring something warm to wear and I suspect they will be proven right. They also asked New Zealanders to bring extra warm clothes and blankets for climatically-ignorant Australians. As I sit in this cabin click-clacking out these words on my iPad, a draft of cool air wafts through the window as if to reinforce my premonition of weather-on-the-decline.

I understand that there is something like 500 attending APC11. Of these, only 75 or so are Australians. This is a bit of a disappointment. NZ, after all, is no further from the east coast than Perth, getting here is easy and local people speak a vowel-deficient dialect of English which, none-the-less, is understandable. It would have been good to have a better representation from the western island, as locals call it, across the water.

Tomorrow

I know this might read a little like a travelogue about Turangi, but I record it anyway and this and the entries that follow are nothing more than my impression of APC11... a non-objective, personal story written from the perspective of someone who can manage to attend only a small number of the workshops and sessions... not some factual documentation of the event.

A familiar argument

In the cabin where we are staying not far from the banks of the Tongariro, there are past editions of *NZ Hunter* magazine. Hunting is big here; on the way down we passed a car with the body of a deer tied across the bonnet. Venison is definitely on the menu, an example of the self-provisioning of food.

In that magazine there is a review of a New Zealand book, WF Benfield's *The Third Wave-Poisoning the Land*, which presents a case against the use of the wildlife poison, 1080.

The first wave of Benfield's title was the coming of Polynesians a millennium ago. Just as is proposed for the extinction of the Australian megafauna and the transformation of ecosystems, Benfield says that the Maori exhausted the wildlife resource of flightless birds (a variety of birds occupied the ecological niches belonging to mammals in other places) and changed the land with "extinctions of the majority of the browsing bird biomass and major forest composition changes".

Europeans, with their animal introductions and their own version of changing the land, arrived 400-500 years after the arrival of the Maori. They are Benfield's second wave. The third wave is the current attempt to undo aspects of European intervention and introductions.

One of these attempts to undo the impacts of the European past takes the form of what in Australia we call bush regeneration or restoration ecology. And just as there is controversy about Australian regenerators attempting to turn the bush back to what evolved after Aboriginal firestick farming was discontinued a little over 200 years ago, so there is a parallel controversy in New Zealand.

Like Settlers in early Australia, Benfield writes that the early European naturalists presumed the land in New Zealand was in its original condition. They did not recognise that the Maori had changed it substantially.

He writes: "Through ignorance, this has become the freeze-frame restoration biodiversity model for current management, entrenched in various acts of parliament and local body regulation."

It's a similar course to that followed in Australia. I'm not maligning bush regenerators here—most are well-meaning people who believe they are making a contribution to a better environment (and I once did a course in bush regeneration and practiced it a little). But they have gained an inordinate level of influence in state and local government and have their own industry to add its influence.

When it comes into conflict with permaculture folk wanting to plant food bearing species and create their recombinant ecosystems however, bush regeneration has the potential to become a brake on urban food security. Permaculture co-originator, David Holmgren, has said a few critical words about restoration ecology.

Nonetheless, it's an interesting topic and the review in the NZ magazine indicates that it is of interest to more than a few Australian permaculture practitioners and food security enthusiasts.

The book reviewer puts it like this in regard to restoration biodiversity: "Benfield states it is an attempt to set the clock back to an idealised world that only existed for a snapshot in time."

It's an intriguing thought to begin a permaculture convergence with.

APC11 DAY ONE



Hawaiian dance practice at the marae

RESILIENCE BY DESIGN was the tagline of this Australasian Permaculture Convergence and resilience is what we got.

First, though, was the official welcome to the marae, which is like a community meeting place for the Maori people... a central place in their community. This took place in the rain and, with the coolness of the morning—let's just say it was cold—I'm sure a few of those from warmer climates had their resilience well tested. The welcome included some rather long speeches, most in Maori, including one by a local man in T-shirt, rolled-up trousers and bare feet standing out in the rain and cold as if he didn't notice. You might say he was well adapted to Turangi's climate.

A lesson on economics

Nicole Foss from the USA, who has been touring New Zealand, gave a keynote presentation on resilience in an age of economic turmoil, and while doing so probably educated more than a few about how our economic system works... or sometimes

doesn't work. Her thesis is that the trends indicate our present economic boom will bust, and it will bust more severely than it did in 2008.

How do we cope with a severe economic downturn... possibly as severe as a depression?

Business as usual will no longer be an option she says, so we need to preserve our freedom of action over the initial shock and what would most likely be a protracted period of adjustment. Freedom of action offers us choice. Hard times, says Nicole, bring people together but they can also give rise to forces in societies that are far less desirable, and so it's the community approach to resilience that would be the most effective.

With credit in very short supply, holding hard cash would offer insurance as the economy falters then fades. So would minimising or eliminating dependency on debt, gaining control over as many resources essential to our existence as possible and moving

into hard goods such as shelter, land with productive capacity, cooking implements, trade goods, low-tech transport such as bicycles, spare parts, communications, solar cookers and the like. In a really severe economic contraction it is goods such as these, goods necessary to life, that would be in demand.

Nicole also suggests investing in local business that maintains local services, especially where their supply lines are short and therefore less vulnerable to rising oil prices. Doing this could include supplying business seed funding. She suggests finding good information online, downloading it and printing it out—broadband fees might not be affordable to many in a severe economic crunch.

Depressionproofing livelihoods mean moving your income stream to the non-discretionary side of the economy. Possibilities might include mediating human interaction, organising and prioritising the use of resources at the local level, supplying essential goods and services, the



Morning and evening sessions were in the main hall. When everyone was there is was standing room only.

provision of cheap escapism and developing practical skills like growing food and healthcare.

Decentralise to avoid retrograde legislation

Nicole advocates decentralisation as a key to coping with change and with retrograde government regulation.

Of the latter, Nicole says you can oppose and/or ignore it. Centralised systems, she says, will not lead because they are rigid and slow to respond. The tools of decentralisation are community action, local currencies that maintain a regional liquidity in the money supply, local control over food security, community time bank trading and all of those activities that build social capital... in short, those things that innovative, permaculture-influenced social entrepreneurs are engaging with. These, unlike those of government, are low-cost solutions that encourage community self-reliance.

Decentralisation, Nicole points out, is not the sort of thing favoured by those with power, however, "the more of us that decentralise, the more difficult it is to stop", she tells listeners.

While national government might be inept in a global financial crisis, Nicole holds hope for local government: "Municipal decisions can make a real

difference", she tells the audience. It "...can remove barriers and get out of the way". I'm reminded of how municipalities in Greece are taking payment for sacks of potatoes and having farmers truck in large bags of the filling, versatile vegetable as a cheap food source during that country's current financial collapse.

According to Nicole: "The future belongs to the adaptable... ask yourself —what are my skills? How could I use these to supply people in difficult times?".

If you're thinking Nicole is some kind of doomsayer, be assured that she is a cool-headed economics woman with an intense understanding of the field.

Food self-reliance with Robina

After Nicole's keynote, I spent two of the Open Space sessions at Robina McCurdy's workshop on local food self-reliance.

Robina is a permaculture educator of long standing who lives at Tui Community on Golden Bay. That's at the northern end of the South Island. She's no stranger to Australian permafalk, many of whom have done her courses during her visits.

"the more of us that decentralise, the more difficult it is to stop"...
Nicole Foss

She worked in South Africa in the late 1990s, first at a dryland farm then in a squatter settlement in Capetown. These were formative experiences that contributed to her present model of a bioregional approach to food security planning, adapting the permaculture zoned landuse concept to that purpose.

Robina's second session brought together people interested or involved in community or local government food security initiatives.

A marked difference

There's been a marked difference with this NZ convergence to others I have attended. That difference is the focus on bigger picture themes like economics and on food security rather than home gardening, which is only a single element in it.

It's as if these New Zealand permaculture practitioners realise that we can scale-up the application of the design system by engaging with civic institutions and, at the same time, work out our community-based systems

while gaining an understanding of how conventional economics and other institutions operate. These, after all, are the societal context within which we do our work.

Beyond peasant permaculture

This economic and big picture focus might please the Australian permaculture practitioner who recently wrote in social media that permaculture needs to do a lot more than engage in what he termed the subsistence 'peasant permaculture' of home gardening if it is to contribute to the sort of sustainable society we want.

Likewise many of the projects people over here are engaged in. These range from food security work with councils, time banking, community economic systems and food swaps, innovative transition town initiatives and more.

What I think we see developing in this country is quite a sophisticated form of permaculture that includes the usual permaculture stuff of domestic and community food growing but at the same time is taking the design system into areas that, when it started decades ago, were then part of permaculture but which have been downplayed over succeeding decades... things like economics. This is heartening and it holds promise for our future.

"Municipal decisions can make a real difference... it can remove barriers and get out of the way"...
Nicole Foss

Thus it was interesting when Robina got up in a session to express frustration that not enough good stuff was happening in her country. Is it that we are so immersed in local actions that we do not see the big picture of what is going on? I

guess we could say the same thing about Australia.

No-names permaculture

The other thing I noticed is that many of those at the sessions I participated in today are practicing branding-free permaculture. What's that? It is this. They practice permaculture-without-the-label, permaculture without 'permaculture' as a tag. It's no-names sustainability, no-names permaculture. This, too, suggests a certain sophistication of approach.

This is something that has had cursory but frequent discussion in Australia over recent years... the question about whether it really is necessary to brand projects with the permaculture name or whether the practice of permaculture in other organisations consists more of applying permaculture principles without the name.

Perhaps this is answered in different ways according to someone's psychological or monetary investment in the design system. Could it be that some permaculture educators and permaculture sole traders feel the need to brand more than do others?

Another significant thing with this convergence is the number attending—500 or so. Surely, that

makes it one of the best attended convergences ever in Oceania... and surely that means something significant.

There have been a couple comments, mainly from Australians, about what happened to all those who at APC10 indicated they would come over the Tasman for this event but who are not here. Nonetheless, the sheer numbers present have given this event, down here at the southern end of Lake Taupo, a vitality that is what all permaculture convergences should have.

Catch-up

This is a friendly, harmonious and tension-free permaculture convergence. It is not overorganised and it is low-key. The mood is constructive and throughout the day you can feast on good ideas, fraternise with creative people, enjoy the abundant food cooked by those associated with the marae, be kissed by the cold rain and catch-up with distant colleagues and friends.

As with all convergences, catching-up is one of the good things.

For me, it involved people like Beck from Victoria, Harry Harrison from South Australia's Rare Fruit Society, Sue—another South



Self-organising music was a spontaneous occurrence at APC11.

Australian who we first met at the 1995 permaculture in schools conference in Adelaide when Robina McCurdy stimulated what for a time became a new trend in permaculture practice, the Seed Savers' Network's Jude and Michel Fanton, Steve Poole from Aldinga Arts Ecovillage in South Australia, Robyn Francis from Djanbung Gardens, Guy Stewart from Nimbin, Joanne Pearsall and Brian Innes from Permaculture Institute NZ and so many more.

Interesting to see was the Fanton's video-documenting things on their iPhones and doing impromptu interviews. They've acquired a clever little steadycam rig for their iPhones and little, and I mean little, plug-in microphones. Does this miniaturization produce good results, I asked Michelle? Sure does, he responded. And speaking of video, the Fantons showed their Seed Savers production, the result of their recent years of extensive traveling to visit seed savers worldwide.

End day one

So, the end of day one... a day that went rapidly amid a buzz of conversation, a cloud of innovative ideas and a bellyfull of good food.

Oh, yes.. there's another good thing these perma-kiwis have done—there's a coffee cart on site and it's doing a booming business caffeinating the attendees to make brains already sharpened by the coolness of the day—let's just say it is cold—even more sharper and capable of cutting away the fanciful from the real world applications of the design system.



Above: The NSW crew.

Below: The Victorian crew.



GALLERY—APC11 DAY ONE



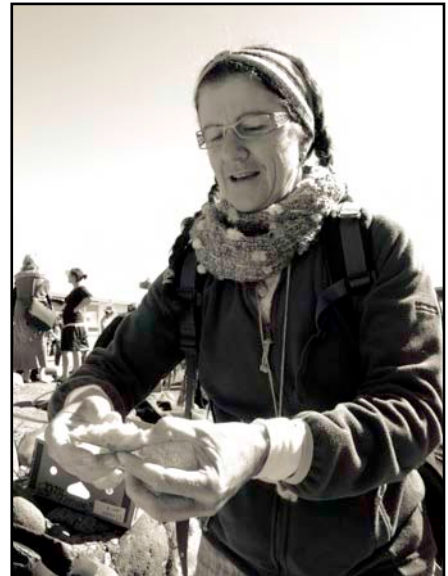
Left: APC11 organiser, Jo Pearsall.



Right: New Zealand permaculture educator, Robina McCurdy.



Left: Melbourne permaculture practitioner, Dan Palmer.



Right: Sunshine Coast author and school permaculture educator, Leonie Shanahan.

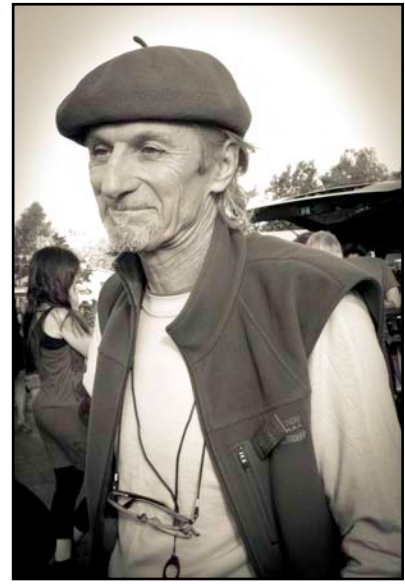


APC11 shop.



Left: Guy Stewart, Nimbin. Right: Robin Francis and colleagues from the Murray region.

GALLERY—APC11 DAY ONE



Seed Savers' Network's Jude & Michel Fanton



Permaculture Vision's April Sampson-Kelly from Mt Kembla, NSW.

GALLERY—APC11 DAY ONE



Jo Pearsall and friend make Irish music in the night bar.



*The bicycle workshops came up with some interesting transport options.
Below: Tools were on sale at the APC11 shop.*



APC11 DAY TWO



THE DAYS of the permaculture convergence number eleven flow into to one another as a flood of good ideas meeting a deluge of innovative people.

Today started with a sometimes broken video link with Charles Eisenstein in the USA. Charles is author of the book, *Sacred Economics*, and his opening question was intriguing: "Why is there no money in permaculture? You're not going to make a lot of money in permaculture... permaculture can't thrive in the money system we have today".

This was the prelude to discussing how the money goes where it will create more money and an explanation of how natural capital is turned into an ever-increasing flow of goods. It's also about how helpful, neighbourly community relationships that once provided free services, such as childcare, have been monetarised by the recently-emerged small business service industry.

Crisis stimulates change

Change, Charles said, seldom happens in the absence of a

crisis of some kind and I couldn't help but think back to yesterday's keynote address by Nicole Foss, also on economics and how permaculture and communities might respond to change.

"Why is there no money in permaculture? You're not going to make a lot of money in permaculture..."
...Charles Eisenstein

Charles pointed out that environmentalists have long sought to prevent natural capital becoming goods. In many ways, his proposals for how permaculture people and their fellow travelers in sustainability might respond echoed Nicole's of the day before:

- building community, such as through community gardens and the gift economy
- political acts that empower people and build their skills, which reduces the market for services
- creating the platforms that enable sharing—"There is no community without a gift economy... sharing creates

Working collaboratively with local government

My session with Fiona Campbell entitled *Working Collaboratively With Local Government* attracted around 24 participants including council staff.

We started by putting people to work at their tables in a group activity to introduce themselves and share information about a project they have had involvement with that in some way included local government. Soon, there was that buzz of enthusiastic conversation you get in the room when people work on something interesting. The findings was summarised by each table on flip chart paper in columns for project, what worked and what hindered.

Conversation followed as the tables reported back the gist of their findings, then we presented images of Australian projects we have had involvement with in our work with Randwick City Council and City of Sydney.

By then, the hour had flown by, too short a time to follow up with our planned SOAR process (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results—part of the process of Appreciative Enquiry) to dig deeper into people's experience and identify ideas for people to make use of.

What the session did reveal, though, is a considerable interest in finding ways to work constructively with local government. This is a good thing because local government is closest to the people, far more so than state and federal government.

bonds and reduces the room for the money machine to grow"; this reduces opportunities to sell

- choosing "food grown for us by people who know us".

Charles said that in a monetarised economy you don't count on the people around you and this can be a barrier to creating community.

Why the economic focus?

In the questions that followed, Charles was asked to comment on something asked by some as to why economics features so prominently. He responded that in permaculture you work with what you have and that you have to adapt to existing conditions and work with people.

Economics is one of those things that we have and it influences much about our lives and opportunities. We have to engage with it to create positive change and to create our own economic instruments for the type of economy we prefer. It's part of what someone said yesterday about setting up the systems we want and using them in daily life—to "...be the change we want to see".

The economic focus also closes the circle with permaculture's formative period when it had a high prominence... those were the days when permaculture gave birth to Earthbank.

In Dunedin

Dr Susan Krumdeck, professor of mechanical engineering at Canterbury University in the South Island, followed Charles with a tour of her project for Dunedin Council—a study of the city's vulnerability to peak oil.

The City initiated the study, Susan joked, because "there were some noisy people in Dunedin who have been sort of pushing council to think about peak oil

and climate change... a push from the ground up".

Even though peak oil is not imminent, it is an issue which she defined as "something that can disrupt what you do... you might have to stop what you are doing and do something else".

According to Susan, the facts about peak oil are clear but they are also confusing. We need to understand oil supply as a planning and management issue, she said, and it is necessary to understand how peak oil might affect city assets... you need to quantify adaptation over planning timeframes".

We might, she suggested, view peak oil not as the end of civilisation but as the beginning of change... "what risks are we willing to take with peak oil?".

Susan went on to discuss the Dunedin project which concluded that increasing population density in the CBD, having regulation that does not stifle initiative, creating integrated urban villages where there are now commercial strips and installing—reinstating, in Dunedin's case—electric trolleys—trams—would assist in adapting to peak oil.

Her comment about the necessity to increase urban population density so as to increase the sustainability of our cities by shortening travel time and distance, increase the viability of local business, create walkable and cycleable neighbourhoods and make more compact cities that don't sprawl, is in line with contemporary thinking on sustainable urbanism.

She alluded to the learning coming from the practice of urban placemaking regarding the viability of business—that it is people moving past shops and not expressly visiting particular businesses that sustains businesses. This is also the learning of Australian placemaking consultant, David Engwicht, who says that leisure shoppers and

social and cultural visitors are the most important on the street as—unlike intentional shoppers who buy and go and passers-through a commercial centre—they linger, look and are more likely to buy because of this.

Summing up options for adapting to peak oil, Susan's words were food for thought: "There are no solutions, only choices".

And the day?

How do you summarise a day when you can't get to all of the sessions that interest you because they run concurrently... another day of plentiful food, of sunshine and cool air, of being outside engaging in conversation with so many interesting people with so many innovative projects?

As I've said, I find indications of a growing sophistication in the permaculture approach being taken by some here, an approach that goes way, way beyond the common preoccupation with home gardening and takes us into more social realms.

This was a point reinforced for me when I walked into the main hall to be confronted by flip chart pages on the wall arranged around a central page proclaiming 'social permaculture'.

Here, a team had been exploring how to interpret David Holmgren's permaculture principles in terms of working with soft systems and people rather than the hard systems of sites and the physical components of design.

Once again, sharing, openness and a willingness to work together were the vibe. It was this and the friendliness of people with their good ideas that, for me, helped make APC11 in New Zealand one of the most memorable of recent convergences.

APC11 DAY THREE



PAST LAKE TAUPO and into the town, north to Cambridge and on to Hamilton. Then... the big city... Auckland... where it's early evening.

Rapid separations from place are like this... you're there talking to people one minute then you're wrenched away speeding through the countryside before you get a chance to think. I find such sudden separations a little disconcerting but I've done enough of them to know that, when I stop and unwind, the fond memories of people and place will still be there.

So it was on the last day of the convergence that we ate a hurried lunch and quickly walked downtown to catch the northbound coach. This necessitated missing the closing ceremony at the marae. Just getting away was something of a challenge with so many people to say farewell to. Some we will see back on Australia's east coast but for others, like Joanne Pearsal and Brian Innes, the departing hug was made in the knowledge that, as they are New Zealanders, it might be some time before we meet again on one side of the Tasman or the other.

At today's lunch a local delicacy was handed out—roasted garlic,

the entire clove of it. Curious, I tried it and found it, well, interesting but definitely not overpowering in flavour though here in Auckland Fiona tells me that I do have something of a garlicky odour about me... strange how she keeps her distance.

The garlic might keep away the debilitating NZ flu which has attacked some at the convergence, mainly Australians. Sylvia, Pete the Permie's partner—they're from Melbourne—was an early victim and today it was Lance Lieber's (from Sydney's Transition Bondi) turn. Fiona and I am a little concerned for him as he plans to extend his Auckland to Turangi cycle tour on to Wellington, hundreds of hilly kilometres further south. He's laying up in Turangi tomorrow in an attempt to shake the bug before setting out.

Observations

Today's morning session in the main hall included a conversation with a group of permaculture educators, two locals and two Australians—Robin Francis and Robyn Clayfield.

As well as education, the branding of permaculture was discussed—that is, how should permaculture be highlighted in

Morning breaks were times for socialising, for networking, for friendships renewed and new... all lubricated by the stimulating scent of coffee being brewed.

The main hall of the Te Kura o Hangi maori school, the venue for APC11, is seen in background, the coffee cart in foreground.

From my notebook at the time...

Am I feeling as positive about this convergence now at its conclusion as I was earlier? Yes, I am.

Sure, there were glitches such as today's program which has to be hurriedly reorganised by Joanne Pearsal. Someone said that the program would have been better organised into strands such as economics, education etc which would have provided more continuity. More than a few said that the one hour sessions were too short and presenters didn't have enough time to do their topic justice.

Some—both Australians and New Zealanders—said that it was disappointing that more Australians didn't make the trans-Tasman hop to join us.

Other people were happy about the convergence too, including the Australians I spoke with. Comments made in conversation were that this was a convivial convergence and there was no politics, no strong or dominating egos present, no 'big names', no tension over how permaculture should be organised.

This convergence—it was an altogether good vibe, they said.

public and is there a need to highlight the work of practitioners by labeling it 'permaculture' at all.

For veteran New Zealand permaculture educator Robina McCurdy, the use of language around permaculture does present something of a dilemma, however she said the the Enviroschools program is permaculture-based, however the word 'permaculture' is not used at all.

The associated question of how to present permaculture to the public came up with Phil, a NZ educator based in Raglan, saying that it needs be presented in a crisp and clean form for the social mainstream. A media strategist said that there are groups at either end of the continuum who would either readily accept or reject permaculture, however there is a large group in the middle between those extremes that we could contact, but doing that would require a communications strategy.

He warned against using the word 'sustainable' in communications because, according to a reader survey he did, the term is linked with environmentalism and many people don't want to be thought of as environmentalists. Talk about people's health instead,

At APC11—permaculture educator, Robyn Clayfield, from Crystal Waters Permaculture Village, SE Queensland.



“.. strategies for different climates offered in the conventional design course are too limited... there are principles that are missing and the ethics (of permaculture) are expressed in different ways in different parts of the world...”

...New Zealand commentator

he said. And don't forget to let people know what's in it for them.

Robyn Francis sees no need to rebrand the design system but we need a diversity of ways to get the message out. She likes the idea of developing professional standards for permaculture work. And on professionalism, Pete the Permie said that having Accredited Permaculture Training as a 'proper' diploma was very helpful, though he was not denigrating other qualifications in permaculture. It was a matter of the way the design systems was perceived. He regards himself as a 'professional' permaculture practitioner and doesn't think that the language around permaculture matters all that much anymore.

For Robina McCurdy, the question is how permaculture educators move beyond the basics of the design system. She, like Robyn Francis, believes that opening dialogue with professional institutes would benefit the design system and that networking with permaculture-trained professionals who are also members of their professional institutes would be a means to do this.

Another of those who got up to have a few words said that the critical question is how well permaculture practitioners respond to coming wave of change.

“ ...there are groups at either end of the continuum who would either readily accept or reject permaculture, however there is a large group in the middle between those extremes that we could contact, however doing that would require a communications strategy...”

...media strategist

On education

One New Zealand educator was quite concerned about the content of permaculture courses, saying that there was content she did not agree with. My understanding of what she said was that some of the content of Bill Mollison's *Permaculture-A Designers' Manual* has dated and that newer information is more up to date. Someone responded that in their courses they use only recent material where it is available.

Every design course is different according to Robyn Francis, who quoted Bill Mollison as saying that permaculture is an ongoing journey of an expanding body of knowledge and tools. It incorporates new ideas and techniques. "Keep it going, keep it expanding", she exhorted the audience, "don't be ashamed to to bring other things in".

Beck Lowe, a permaculture educator from rural Victoria, said there is more than one way to teach permaculture and that not all teachers register with the Permaculture Research Institute to teach their prescribed course. That there is a move to diverge from the Institute's course structure was clear in comments at the convergence about teaching bioregional and climatic strategies for the climate and geography the course is held in rather than to offer an inadequate smattering of strategies for different climatic regions. One commentator put it that the strategies for different

climates offered in the conventional design course are too limited to form the basis for advising people living in those climate about what they should do.

Even the permaculture principles came up for critical discussion—something I've never seen at a convergence. One New Zealander said that there are principles that are missing and that the ethics are expressed in different ways in different parts of the world.

Robyn Francis responded by saying that permaculture is about 'the holding of life'. Permaculture "is not set in stone", she said.

A long-time permaculture educator put the creation of the principles into historic perspective by telling the audience that permaculture book co-author, Reny Slay, married to Bill Mollison at the time, actually put the principles together by extrapolating content from the first two permaculture books,

Permaculture One and *Permaculture Two*.

Another comment about permaculture principles was that mention of the permaculture landuse zoning system is missing from the principle set devised by David Holmgren.

After that, Robyn Clayfield tackled the taboo about spiritual content in design courses by saying that students have asked for spiritual content, and that she thinks 'spiritcare' could be a fourth ethic.

'Spirit', here, was not referring to dieties or metaphysics, rather to personal spirit in terms of existentialism. Even so, Robyn's idea for a fourth ethic would be sure to create controversy if more seriously proposed as an addition to the ethics. Bill Mollison discusses the notion of spirit in his *Designers' Manual* but maintains permaculture content as strictly secular.

Students have asked for spiritual content, and that she thinks 'spiritcare' could be a fourth ethic.

It has never been common at convergences to question its basics such as the principles and the content of permaculture courses. It seems that not even these things are safe now from the questioning of their relevance.

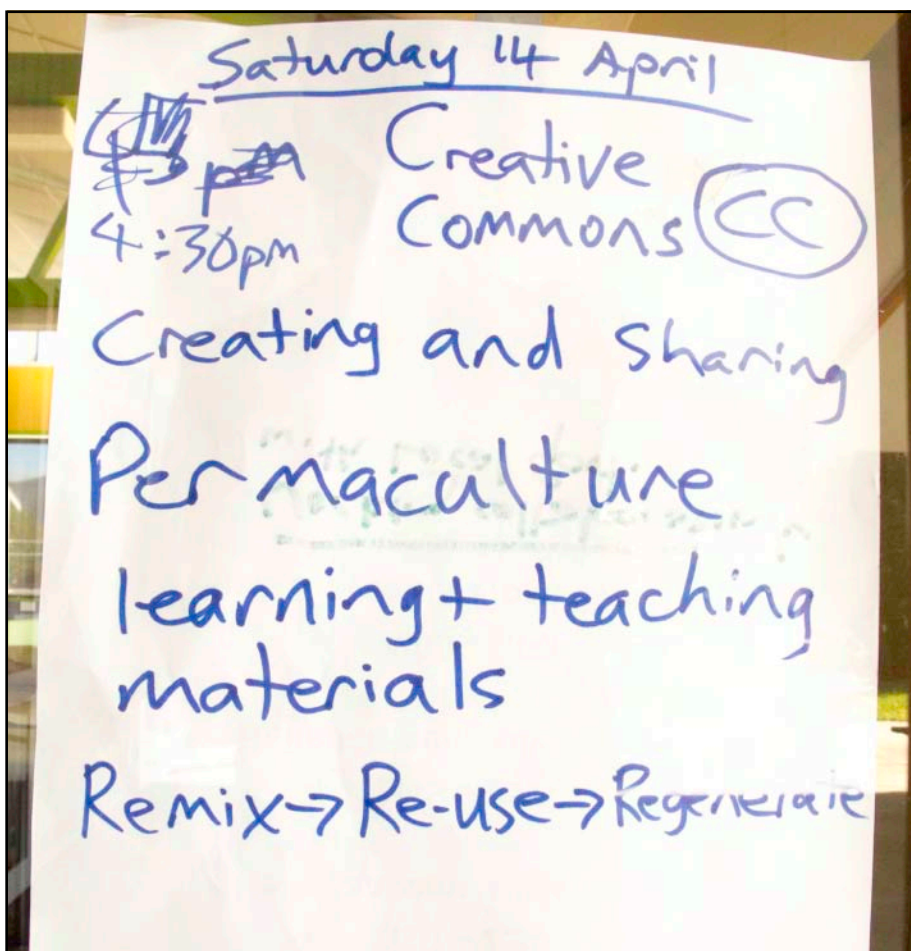
Questioning sacred cows in permaculture

Don't underestimate the significance of this session and of other conversations during the convergence. It has never been common at permaculture convergences to question its basics such as the principles and the content of permaculture courses. It seems that not even these things are safe now from the questioning of their relevance and that a new spirit of questioning the previously unquestionable is emerging. This, I think, can only benefit the permaculture design system.

I come away from APC11 optimistic that permaculture has a future and that new, young leaders are emerging. You could see this in the quality and innovation in their work and it became clear that they are not held back by preconceived ideas on how permaculture should be done and taught.

You get the idea that they will simply use water logic and bypass, rather than engage with and confront, some of those shibboleths that have seemed so important to a past generation of permaculture practitioner.

Here's hoping.



New pathway to sustainability

THE IDEA was born at a whole town sustainability meeting in 2009 where energy, transport and food were identified as the most important areas of need for the northern NSW town of Nimbin, a small centre set amid the pasture and hills about a half-hour drive inland of Lismore, the region's main commercial centre.

A food security working group emerged from that meeting and pitched its request for funding to the \$2 million state government funded Food Links program that brought together a number of local governments in the region to work on food-related projects. The program managers must have thought the proposal a good one, for they voted it a grant of \$50,000.

The Nimbin Food Security Project was born and attending Guy Stewart's presentation about it was for me the highlight of APC11's third day.

Part of the appeal was the involvement of Fiona Campbell and myself in food-related projects in Sydney, such as with the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance and as City Cousin collection depot managers for the community supported agriculture initiative, Sydney Food Connect, a local social enterprise started by social entrepreneur, Julian Lee, who in the 1990s became a graduate of our urban permaculture design course.

Personal attributes + knowledge + skills = future permaculture leaders

Guy completed his Diploma of Permaculture at Robin Francis' Permaculture College Australia in Nimbin.

Becoming the project manager of the Nimbin Food Security Project, to which he brings personal attributes such as approachability, attitude and skills, he is now positioned as one

of the permaculture movement's emerging leaders.

Guy is a young man and he presented his work to APC11 without fanfare, as if setting up and managing a funded food project was an everyday sort of thing to do.

It was modesty like this that marked the emerging leaders of the movement at APC11.

Finding an auspicing agency

The Nimbin Neighbourhood Centre has long been a presence on Cullen Street, the wide, main street that is both social venue and thoroughfare, and it took on the role of auspicing the Food Security Project.

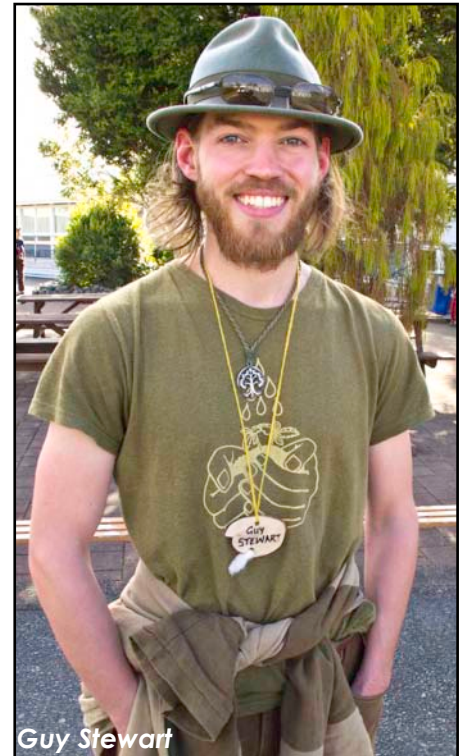
Food security is one of those terms with multiple meanings. At a base level it can mean nothing more than a continued supply of food irrespective of quality and source. At best, it takes on meanings better described as food sovereignty, the year-round supply of good food of a type preferred by eaters, produced by methods of which the eaters approve and distributed fairly across society.

The Nimbin project took more of a food sovereignty approach as it was based on whole systems thinking that considered the entire food chain from growing and production to distribution at local retail outlets.

Getting started

To get started, New Zealand permaculture and community development consultant, Robina McCurdy, travelled to Nimbin to run a workshop that mapped food producers, resources and other pertinent information in the region.

Over a weekend, Robina and workshop participants looked at how and from where the Nimbin population sourced its food



supply, who was involved in the local food industry and the links between participants. There was a role play about conflict in the local food supply and identification of how local government regulations and compliance requirements affected food-related opportunities at the farmers' market.

This provided Guy with baseline information for the project.

The Blue Knob Farmers' Market became a focus for the project and a 'backyarder's table' was set up to enable trading in home-grown produce.

Presentations and workshops were introduced to add value to attending the market through enabling local people to share their knowledge. Free food safety training was offered to producers.

There were many more initiatives within the Nimbin Food Security Project and Guy showed some of them in action via video.

Putting permaculture in the big picture

What was so important about Guy's project?

First, it was directly related to one of the basic human needs identified by Abraham Maslow in his hierarchy of needs (in addition to food the hierarchy includes shelter, adequate clothing, personal security and health care as the basic survival needs without which any further personal development is unlikely).

Second, it was a project that linked permaculture practice and motivation to mainstream society through relationships with funding bodies, local government and regional livelihoods. This demonstrated the value of the design system to mainstream society.

Thirdly, the project linked food security, quality and availability and the livelihoods of those involved in the food supply chain within the regional economy. This took permaculture thinking—which should be, of course, whole systems thinking—beyond the usual focus on home gardening and positioned commercial primary production and distribution and the design system approach within the broader context of the regional

The Nimbin Food Security Project demonstrates how people trained in the permaculture design system are finding constructive roles in mainstream society without losing the edginess that comes through a permaculture approach.

What they take into conventional roles is a capacity to think both critically and holistically, to apply permaculture's principles and to act in accordance with the design system's ethics of sustaining people and planet through the sharing of resources.

food economy and food supply and value chain. This added a valuable sophistication to the project.

Mainstream role for alternative system

For Guy, the Nimbin Food Security Project appears to have imparted valuable skills and knowledge that he may go on to apply in other circumstances.

For Nimbin and its region, it brought together people involved in the food supply chain.

For permaculture, the project provided experience in applying its ideas in a mainstream economic and social setting.

In a way, Guy's presentation about the project continued the economic theme highlighted by Nicole Foss and Charles Eisenstein at their keynote addresses and linked back into permaculture's past—and into its present for some—focus on local economic initiatives.

Looked at from this perspective, permaculture seemed to be moving beyond its usual demimonde and into wider society.

As Guy described it, the Nimbin Food Security Project supported initiatives to build alternative but viable structures at the local and regional level, thus enacting the permaculture idea of bioregional development.

More information
Guy Stewart: <http://apc11.co.nz/apc11/presenters/guy-stewart.html>

Northern Rivers Food Link: <http://www.northernriversfoodlinks.com.au/>

Food Connect Sydney: <http://sydney.foodconnect.com.au/>

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance: <http://australian.foodsovereigntyalliance.org/>

Food security project a new local initiative

Nimbin—it conjures up images either of dope smoking hippies lounging around or of an innovative social experiment. As is usually the way, the town embraces its opposites but tends to the constructive end of the continuum.

Nimbin's rebirth started with the Aquarius Festival of 1973 after which the town was never again the sleepy dairying backwater it started as. New people, new ideas, new practices came to town over the following decades and completely transformed the place.

The town has struggled with its reputation, being both maligned by irresponsible media reporting and defended by those who live there.

That's why the Nimbin Food Security Project has been important. It shows that, rather than a refuge for the hippy remnant, Nimbin is a progressive place with its own economy and culture. The project adds to the other positive developments of Nimbin's entrepreneurs such as Robin Francis with her Djanbung Gardens centre, home to her Permaculture College Australia and base for local festivals and initiatives. Then there's the Jalanbah Eco-Hamlet, a new model of rural living that combines private-house-in-community. And there's the local energy technology business, the Rainbow Power company established decades ago.

Now, into this innovative context we can add Guy Stewart's work with the Nimbin Food Security Project.

APC11 TOUR—EARTHSONG

Cohousing

Cohousing is a Scandinavian model in which housing is developed as a community asset. It offers the opportunity for personal privacy and at the same time the security of community.

The usual model features a shared dining and kitchen space although the dwellings all have small kitchens. Like Earthsong, cohousing usually offers a range of other community opportunities such as a community garden and community laundry.

In high-cost-of-living cities, cohousing offers the opportunity for affordable housing. Because of its compact design, it can provide the advantages of city living on a comparatively small footprint of land. Dwellings in cohousing developments are generally energy and water efficient.

It is these characteristics and the social values coming from people living in close proximity and making decisions together than makes cohousing a component of sustainable urbanism.

Cohousing is no longer only a Scandinavian development. The model is taking off in the US and Australia, where the country's first cohousing development was Cascade Cohousing in Hobart. Others have followed.

Earthsong is Auckland's first cohousing.

Learn more about Earhsong at:
<http://www.earthsong.org.nz/>



Looking over the outdoor dining area of Earthsong's community building to the garden and dwellings beyond.

EARTHSONG—New Zealand's first co-housing project, is in Auckland. It was good to tour this excellent development and learn about the water and energy design, to see the community garden and orchard, the vegetables gardens and chooks (light sussex variety), the energy efficient houses all with solar hot water and to learn how decisions are made and about the social design of the place.

This is an urban development of attached terrace houses of two levels in groups of three to four, placed on the site in clusters. There are ground level dwellings for those less mobile with apartments above, and a large community building with dining/meeting space, community kitchen, teens room, laundry/craft room, young children's room, lounge area, guest room and outdoor eating area. Large windows to the north, sheltered by a pergola with a grape vine starting to curl through it, front a community open space dotted with fruit trees and a small ampitheatre with a vegetable garden to the side. Each housing cluster has a common area at centre, with table and seats.

This is a compact, medium density development... a good example of community living in the city that brings the advantages of numbers of people on a small land footprint, proximity to public transport and shops.

Earthsong has its own food coop, community garden and orchard, car pooling and swapping of unneeded possessions at a swap centre in the laundry/craft room... a fine example of sustainable urbanism.

First tour

People said their goodbyes and left for tours after APC11 finished in Turangi. Earthsong was our first tour and we had returned to Auckland for it as our work is in sustainable urbanism and we didn't want to miss the opportunity to visit the cohousing.

In the 1990s we had been with the group that tried to start Inner Pod Cohousing in Sydney but that hadn't eventuated for a number of reasons. Now we were to see one that did eventuate and that works.



Earthsong cohousing

Earthsong is located in the suburbs of Auckland not far from public transport and shops.

As this photo shows, much of the landscaping in the development is of the edible variety. Herbs, vegetables and fruit trees are found throughout the place.

Water is harvested in planted contour ditches or swales as it moves across the site and ends up in a large pond at the lowest level of the property.

The small building in the photo opposite is a children's playhouse.

Motor vehicles are housed in a shared carpark adjacent to the entrance and the settlement is otherwise a pedestrian zone.



Pedestrian paths lead to the two level dwellings which are equipped with solar water heaters. Heating water is often the largest component of household energy consumption and energy cost.

The buildings face sunward so as to make the most of direct sunlight, especially for warming in winter where at 36.8 degrees south latitude. With a maritime cool temperate climate, winters can be quite chilly.



The land Earthsong occupies was in times past an orchard and established fruit trees are found on site.

Seen here is the community garden and orchard where those interested grow herbs and vegetables suited to the cool temperate climate, and harvest the fruit.

APC11 TOUR DAY 1—TARANAKI

Dee Turner's property below the volcanic cone of Taranaki.



Tours

One of the difficult decisions that have to be made at permaculture convergences is which of the tours to attend. You know that by going off in one direction you will miss a lot of interesting places and by going in another direction the same thing will happen.

So it was at APC11.

The Taranaki tour, however, took us to sites urban and rural, offering a blend of how groups and individuals approach the use of permaculture on these islands and how the design system fits into their lives and sometimes their livelihoods. That, it turned out, is in quite a diversity of ways.

TARANAKI... its high, conical cone dominates this place in the same way that Mt Wellington dominates Hobart. Wherever you are in the Taranaki there it is—its extinct volcanic cone poking high into the sky or disappearing into cloud.

The mountain dominated the sky on the first morning of the post-APT Taranaki tour as we navigated the narrow winding road to Dee Turner's property. Around a corner, over a hill and there it was—a house of New Zealand timber largely completed and the first house on the site a little downslope, conspicuous for the solar panels on its roof. Adjacent on the rise above the dam a small shack or, as they are called here, a 'bach'.

The farm

It's only four hectares in area, but Korito Organics, as Dee's property is called, is a mixed small farm, certified organic, and makes use of the biodynamic farming system.

At 420m altitude, the farm gets the full force of Taranaki's fierce winds and Dee and husband have planted shelterbelts of a hardy local tree with oval, glossy leaves capable of withstanding the local weather. As on other properties we would visit, defence from wind was a prime concern.

The property demonstrates the classic permaculture zoned landuse model with landuses placed in relation to the home according to frequency of access for monitoring and harvest as modified by soil, landform and external factors such as direction and strength of wind.

The new house has a vegetable garden made up of a number of circular, galvanised iron planters and several rectangular growing beds. Here, herbs and vegetables for the household are grown in a space the size of average NZ garden, something that Dee will use in



Dee and her husband are building their house of a hardy New Zealand timber.

In the foreground is the vegetable garden that feeds the household. Beyond the land falls and here the couple have made yards for the animals with fodder trees lower downslope.

modeling home food production to her students with urban lots. Dee plans to expand the garden with WWOOFer help (WWOOFER-Willing Workers on Organic Farms).

Adjacent on the edge of a small slope is the Wormerator composting toilet and greywater tanks. After processing, greywater will be gravity fed to plantings to be established on the level clearing below.

Over in front of the first house to be built the vegetable and herb garden has narrow access paths known as 'keyhole' paths because that is what they look like. Their purpose is to provide access to plants otherwise out of reach from the sides of the garden.

Simple pleasures have not escaped the owners. On a platform cut into the slope below the garden bed is a social space with central fireplace and, close by, a hot tub. Here, a couple old enamel bathtubs have been placed over a small fireplace that is fed fuelwood from the side. And, here, you can imagine the inhabitants zoning out in the steaming hot water while all about is cold and frosty.

The path to the first house passes through an mixed orchard of temperate climate fruits. The trees are still small, exhibiting only a few years's growth. When Dee

had the area for the house leveled she had a berm raised to the side to protect the orchard from cold, strong winds, creating a sheltered microclimate.

Energy

Both houses feature solar hot water systems and the first house has a photovoltaic array on the roof for supply electricity. This is supplemented by a microhydro turbine some distance away in a creek flowing through a neighbour's property, the system being installed by local turbine manufacturer, Michael Lawly, whose property we would visit that afternoon.

Winter heating comes from a slow combustion stove and gas supplies energy for cooking.

A productive dam

Eels moved into the dam only three hours after it was filled, Dee told us. How they knew there was a new body of water about and where they came from remains unknown.

Lined with volcanic clay with the berm reinforced by the stabilising roots of New Zealand flax, a clumping plant with long, stiff, pointed leaves that can be used for weaving, the dam fills the bottom of a gully and was once home to ducks although there are none present now—their small house remains unoccupied. Their departure, said Dee, was marked by the return of the watercress.

Upslope of the dam is the small shack, during the tours of the Taranaki district a temporary home to Australian permaculture educator, April Sampson-Kelly and her husband. Opposite is a nursery protected by shade cloth and a large greenhouse inside of which are beans, tomato and friar cap chili. Taking the dare, a few of us took a wary bite but found it rather mild, though I admit to avoiding the seeds. Sheltering both the greenhouse and the dam is a hedge of hardy native trees.

Moving towards the house, we passed a living work in progress. Dee has established a variety of willow she plans to pleach to form a living wall that will create an enclosed space within the circle.

Animals part of permaculture systems

In Dee's permaculture zone three roam a number of Wiltshire sheep. The males, said Dee, are for food and the females will be kept for breeding. A hardy animal, the Wiltshire is not prone to fly strike. A cow in the adjoining paddock may at some time join its animal neighbours on the dinner table.

Dee has planted supplementary feed of fodder trees at the bottom of the paddock—tagasaste (also known as tree lucerne), poplar, willow.

Engineers in the hills

Michael Lawly is an engineer and his rural property is an engineering enterprise where he and his co-workers at Eco Innovation produce micro-hydroelectric and wind turbines. You see three of the turbines spinning rapidly in the wind as you enter the property and you hear their whine when you get out of the minibus.

You also notice the large dam, the two-level timber house and the microhydro works on the creek—all backed by the sight of Taranaki's not-so-distant cone. It was the works on the creek that Michael took us to first.

He explained that the large waterwheel on the stream, among the overhanging branches of riverbank trees, is no longer in use, however the five hydro turbines are. Pelton wheels spun and water gushed as he brought several of them up to power to demonstrate some of the renewable energy technologies he produces in the workshop near his house.

Next we walked over to a large array of photovoltaic (PV) panels that track the sun through the day. Michael thinks it's now simpler to add a few additional panels than to have a tracking array as the cost and engineering of the tracking system is avoided. There are more PV panels on the roof of the house.

Ten years ago, Michael said, photovoltaics cost around \$10/watt. The efficiency of PV technology has improved so much, he said, that it now costs around \$1/watt. Energy produced in this way is becoming cheaper to produce energy than to conserve. This is a place with energy to spare.

Along the walkway by the dam we come to an array of three solar hot water systems of the evacuated tube type, a combined hot water storage of 600 litres. These are Chinese



Michael Lawly's Eco Innovation centre.

systems that Michael bulk buys by the container load. They are cheap and displace few New Zealand jobs, as much of the manufacturing is carried out by industrial robots, the employment being in installation.

PV arrays and plentiful hot water wasn't all there was to see by the dam. As well as a couple open kayaks, a peculiar raft was tied up by the shore. A rectangular platform held afloat by plastic drums fastened below, the interesting feature was the bathtub at centre. This, explained Michael, was for the guests staying at the hostel he has built on site, a two level timber structure. They use the plentiful supply of hot water from the solar heater array to fill the bathtub then paddle put onto the dam to drift in happy contemplation of the constellations above, until the water loses its heat and the coolth of evening starts to be felt.

The rest of the tour consisted of a somewhat technical discussion in the workshop followed by afternoon tea on the covered patio beside the house, above the dam.

Fiona and I spent the next two nights in the hostel.

Guests on the first evening found it necessary to fire up the slow combustion stove but the

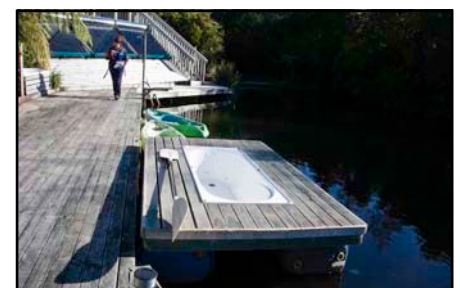
following night was mild enough not to need it.

What a pleasure to awaken on the second day and to walk outside to see Taranaki's flanks lit pink by the rising sun.



Above: Microhydro turbines turn the waters of the creek into electrical energy.

Below: The hot tub raft for drifting in watery warmth on the dam.



APC11 TOUR DAY 2—TARANAKI



Avonstour Rare Breed Farm

Below...

April Sampson-Kelly makes friends with a mottled, monochrome pig.

Middle: Lunch and a talk.

Lower: One of the many rare breeds of fowl.

FLUFFY HEADED, long legged, small bodied, bulky-bodied, black, white, red, grey, mottled... never, ever, have I seen so many strange chooks in one place.

And that was just the chooks... there were ducks too, all in their own configuration of size and feather... and down in the lower paddock a large mob or heard (or is it a 'gaggle'?) of large grey geese in their multitude... and the Canterbury Blue, the European Wild and other pigs... and the large black and white cattle... goats... and a small black and white, furry, mottled pig which, when I wasn't looking at lunch, ate my bread. Oh, and lunch—not all that long ago it was on the claw in this same yard, clucking happily. It was food metres here, not food miles.

We were at Avonstour, a farm of rare breed animals... a gene bank of rare DNA sequences expressed as walking, bleating, clucking, mooing living animals... rare breeds of animals being preserved not in some zoo but as commercially viable conservation... preservation through use so that those gene sequences could continue their evolution over here in the rolling

hills on the western side of the North Island.

Day two starts

Avonstour Rare Breed Farm wasn't our first stop on the second day of the post-APC11 Taranaki tour. It was stop number two.

We had spent the morning downtown in New Plymouth, the main city on the North Island's west coast which, including its hinterland, is home to nearly 70,000 here at 39 degrees south latitude.

Led by a local guide who is also an artist, a Maori man versed in the Maori and European history of the area, we had followed a small stream into the suburbs, trekking through the narrow band of forest that is the Hauraki Walkway.

Morning tea was at the home of a permaculture practitioner within sound of her chooks and within sight of her food garden. She told us how something like ten or so households in the immediate area had got together to form their own food co-op, to look at car sharing and to plant a community orchard.



This is self-initiated, self-managing community enterprise and we had our morning tea just after passing the young community orchard installed in the walkway and maintained by local people. It's still a cluster of very young trees but, standing there looking at it, you could easily imagine it growing over the years into a valuable, and edible, community asset.

Sated with tea and chocolate-cake goodies and the conversation of good company, we walked on and soon came to something as hidden as it was unexpected.

A valley of a very special kind

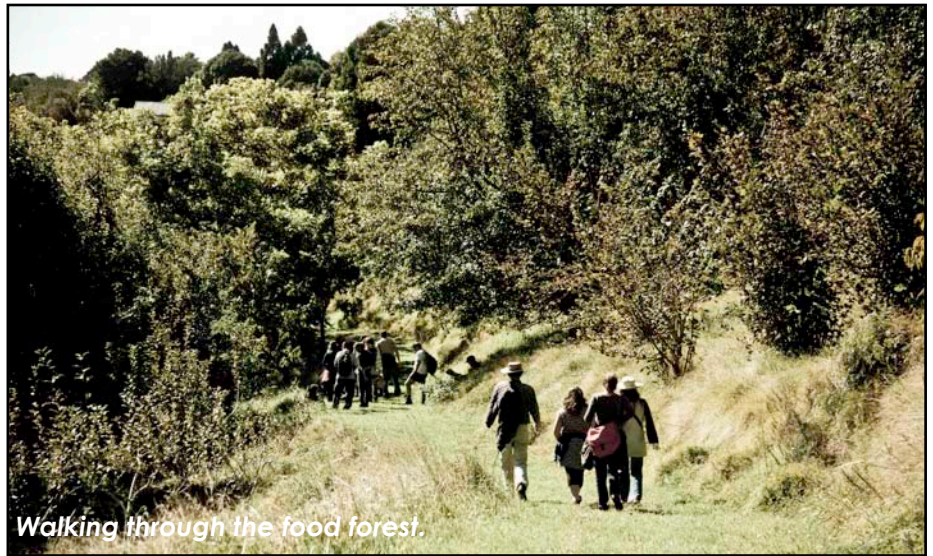
We walked along the street before rejoining the walkway. On we went... not all that far really... until we seemed to be entering a somewhat wilder section of track.

We followed the track around a curve to enter a valley, the long grass (fortunately free of snakes, which are entirely absent in New Zealand) and treed slopes rising steeply on one side and the valley falling to its lower reaches amid a thicket of, dense, dark trees a few tens of metres away on the other side. This was a small valley but not all that small—walking its length was a good eight or so minute stroll.

But... there was something peculiar about this little valley, something not quite right, something somehow different. We realised what it was when someone pointed out that what was different was the vegetation, the trees, which we could see were of quite a number of different types.

Then, it dawned on us. Here we stood in a valley not of native bush but... of food trees. We stood amid a food forest on a grand scale.

It was something a council worker had planted over a decade ago, we were told... an edible, hidden treasure tucked



Walking through the food forest.

away in a steep sided little valley off the road in the suburbs... a mixed orchard of apple, stone fruit, avocado, loquat, medlar, olive, stone pine, a lone Bunya pine and so many more.

This was no modest planting in scale and, so were we informed, there are more of these semi-hidden food forests in New Plymouth. What far-sightedness and what an edible landscape... I have seen nothing like it in Australia.

A track led on to a fence with a stile to cross it and into a patch of remnant local forest... trees unknown to the Australians in the group and with tall tree ferns reaching high for the light. This was another valuable vegetative gem interfacing with the fruit and nut trees on the adjacent slopes to create something of biological importance in this city.

So, rare breeds, a little history, urban bushland, community orchards, chocolate slice and a landscape of very green, very corrugated New Zealand countryside that we passed through.

On the bus, Australian permaculture educator, April Sampson-Kelly, said something about this tour being as good as the permaculture convergence itself, and how true that was.

And tomorrow... more of it.

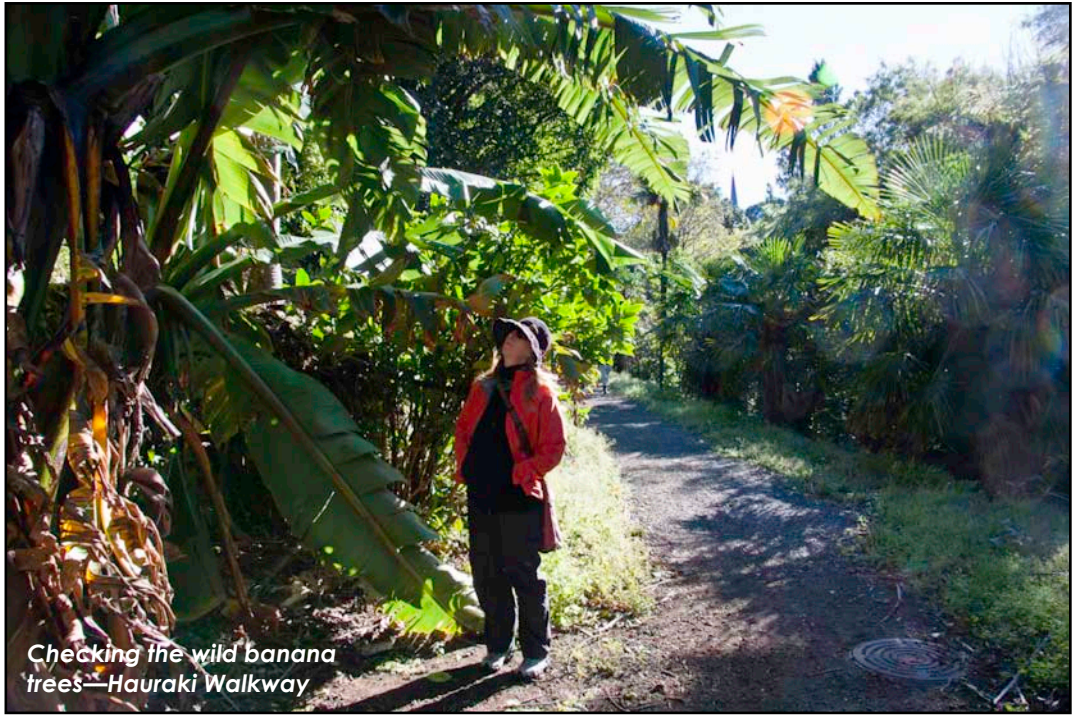


Apple grove in the food forest

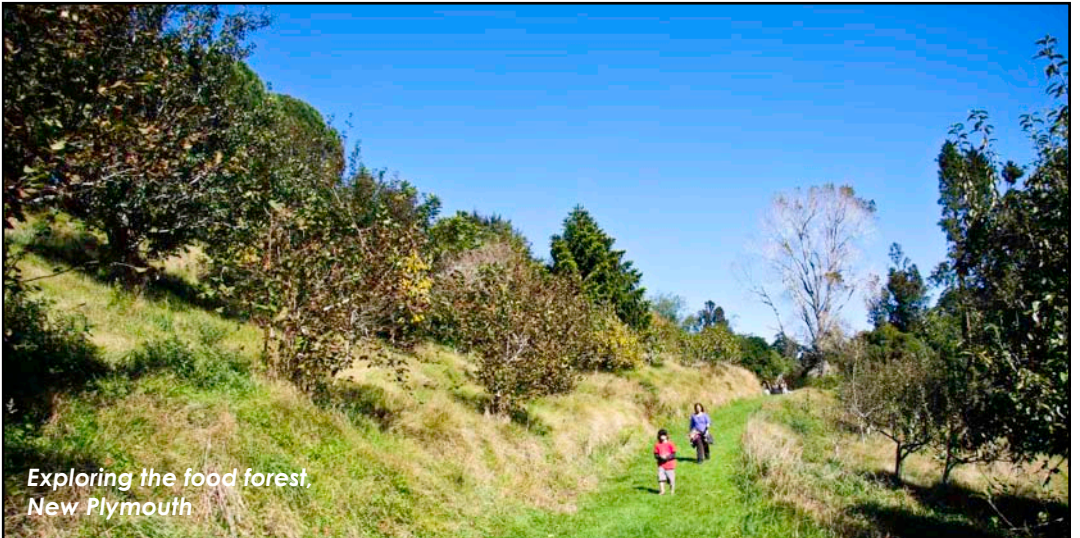


Medlars in the food forest.

GALLERY—APC11 TARANAKI TOUR



Checking the wild banana trees—Hauraki Walkway

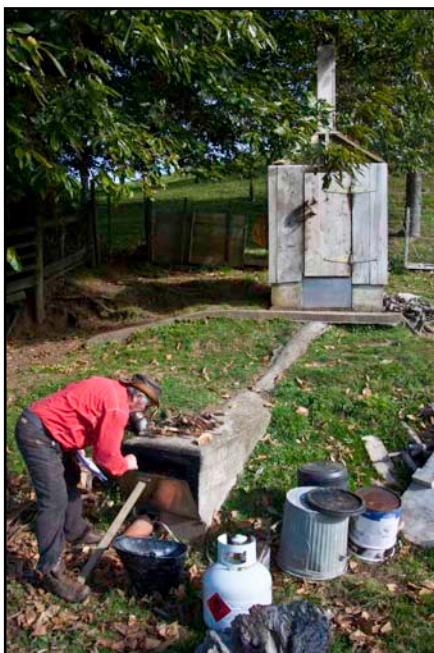


Exploring the food forest, New Plymouth



Digging for yams, Avonstour Rare Breed Farm

GALLERY—APC11 TARANAKI TOUR



Avonstour Rare Breed Farm

*from top:
A mobile chook shed moved
around for grazing.*

*Living fence posts of poplar.
Meat smoker for processing farm
produce.*

APC11 TOUR DAY 3

GALLERY—APC11 TARANAKI TOUR



Dan and Bena's smalholding is presently in development. The bowl will eventually be terraced for fruit growing.



Dan demonstrates the combined grey/blackwater compost system.



Dan in one of his swales that harvest rainwater runoff.

GALLERY—APC11 TARANAKI TOUR



Above: Always time for a break.



Left: Bena and lunch. No going hungry on this tour.

Below: April Sampson-Kelly, a permaculture educator offering an internet-based permaculture design course from her home at Mt Kembla, NSW.



APC11 TOUR DAY 3—TARANAKI



Pat & Sandi—gardeners & surfers

PAT AND SANDI—here's two people who have discovered the secret of life. For them, that consists of two things—gardening and surfing.

It was to their small property that we drove after leaving Dan and Bena's smallholding in the hills. Here near the coast the terrain is flat and the property appears as a clump of dense vegetation amid an open landscape of farmland.

Imagine their garden as a series of rooms divided by tall hedges that block the winds, each room

having a separate purpose—vegetable garden, various tree crops, entertaining and outdoor dining and, of course, the chook run. This takes the form of chickens occupying the ground layer with small fruit trees above, such as the ubiquitous feijoa that is found everywhere in this area.

And their other passion? Well, the Tasman coast with its long, cold swells is close by and the challenge must surely be choosing between riding their unfolding energy and the growing energy of the garden.



Below:
Dr Harry Harrison from South Australia's Rare Fruits Society is confronted by the flower of an Abyssinian banana.

Left below: The couple are partly fed from their kitchen garden.

Below right: The garden shed is equipped with a bunk.



Last words—a reflection

Permaculture as platform

APC11 made it clear to me that permaculture is a platform on which its practitioners build applications designed to achieve specific ends.

As a platform it consists of a set of ethics accepted by all who participate in the design system (I have yet to meet any practitioners who don't support the ethics) and a variable set of principles to guide its implementation.

The principles are not like fixed laws—they are selected as relevant to the purpose at hand and often have to be interpreted, negotiated and adapted. The ethics, in contrast, are fixed but are so general that they can be achieved in many ways.

There's another thing that the ethics do, and that's act as a barrier to entry... a filter. Many movements have barriers to entry and this makes sense as it imposes a core belief or approach that it can be assumed all practitioners act within. It's a sort of default setting for the movement.

In doing permaculture, a flexible and imaginative mind is a distinct advantage. So is a capacity for a blend of critical, analytical thought and whole systems thinking—the ability to see the elements of a design or of some problem you are trying to solve in all their connections to other elements.

Dee Turner's farm, Taranaki



MAYBE IT'S JUST a partial impression coming from having an innovative bunch of people together in one place, but I came away from APC11 with the notion that people in New Zealand are applying the design system's ideas and principles in a diverse and exploratory sort of way. From community economics to planning, creating community housing, rural landuse and community-led development, there was much to suggest that permaculture design in New Zealand has in many cases taken a leadership role.

I thought I might be imagining this or making an assumption based on too little evidence after comments from one prominent New Zealand practitioner exhorting her fellow countryfolk to catch up. However when I asked an Australian attendee back in this country he said that it was his impression too that permaculture practice in New Zealand was in many ways exemplary.

There are many innovative things going on here, too, that permaculture people are involved in. The sense I got at the convergence was that in the New Zealand examples there was some kind of more direct link between permaculture and the initiatives people were taking. In Australia it seems that there is greater distance between permaculture and some of these things. Community economics, for example... LETS (Local Exchange and Trading Systems) once had deeper links with permaculture because of the overlap of people involved in both. Now, that link seems more tenuous and LETS and others of the kind are sometimes led by people with no history in permaculture.

It was a pity that the video link to David Holmgren, at the start of proceedings, was dysfunctional and we were left with a recorded mini-lesson of David going through the principles. A direct Q&A would have been more interesting especially if he had responded to questions from APC participants. Bill Mollison was to attend but he was not fit to do so, at the time recovering from a recent health issue.

It is the precedent of history that these two are asked to convergences and is fitting that this is done. I think what would be most valuable from them would be a retrospective on the design system... how they see it

having changed and a little speculation as to its direction in relation to changes in the world.

At APC11, participants asked the organisers for more time to network. At all of the convergences and conferences of the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network (<http://communitygarden.org.au>) that I have attended, informal, unstructured time to meet and talk has been valuable though in short supply, but at recent permaculture convergences it's been as if organisers have felt it necessary to fill every minute. People could decide to meet and talk but there was competition with organised events and it was always a tough decision to drop out of the official program even temporarily to have a conversation. The networking time at APC11 was valued.

Sometimes, it's as if the rural-urban divide that supposedly separates rural and urban Australians manifests in permaculture.

There has been something of a rural farming focus in permaculture that is demographically unrepresentative though nutritionally relevant and which has been reflected in convergences, though those who attend them will recognise

that this is something of a generalisation. That's why the greater focus on economics at the morning keynote presentations was welcome as was content around urban systems and social permaculture. For Australians, it was as if the reality that we are an urban nation had been recognised.

Social permaculture

One of the opening activities was to cluster at one then another of the themes organisers has posted on signs on the wall of the main hall. I found a reasonable number meeting under the 'social permaculture' sign.

Speaking with people there, it was apparent that there exists ambiguity about what the term implies. This varied from someone who asked whether it was about permies getting together to have a good time (perhaps not such a bad idea at all) to more accurate allusions to permaculture's 'invisible systems' or 'soft systems'.

Is it that more people are realising that it is relationships between people, the use of authentic participatory processes (rather than just consultation) and skills in simple project management that make permaculture projects work, or otherwise, and that the design of physical things like sites is the less

challenging and is often subsequent to getting those soft systems done first?

My thinking on this was influenced during training in the practice of placemaking by Australian consultant, David Engwicht. David explained that producing a design for a site comes later and that defining what goes into that design, and where, is what leads the design process.

This goes against the idea of the professional landscape architect or planner—or the permaculture designer—taking a design led approach. What we want is a people-led approach, led by those who would use the design.

This, I think, would be good for permaculture practitioners and is a way of making real the notion of social permaculture. It could be a positive point of difference separating them from other designers. I think that more permaculture designers need to adopt this approach and that it be taught in permaculture education.

Thinking back on APC11, it seems we are in some ways moving towards a people-centric approach to our work in the design system. This low-key, convivial convergence nudged us forward just that little bit more.

