

Earlier this year in March, I had received the wonderful opportunity to represent South Africa as the 2018 IPPS Australia exchangee. This was an opportunity many before me had been given and I had planned to make the most out of it.

Departing from South Africa

The day of departure was Saturday May 12th 2018. I had been anticipating this day for quite some time and was quite nervous about it. The trip took a total of 22 hours connecting through Doha, Qatar and final destination Perth, Australia the Sunday evening. Lo and behold, who would I have picking me up at the Airport? Mr David Hancock who I had met earlier in the year at the South African IPPS conference, the sight of a familiar face made the entry into Australia seem less daunting. I would arrive that same evening at David's house in Perth and meet his wife Jan Hancock.

Beginning of the tour of Perth, Australia

We wasted no time, I began work at Natural Area Consulting Management Services on Monday morning. David took me on a tour introducing me to all the staff, the different departments as well as their tool shed where I found some interesting tools that were quite foreign to me, a seed separator, tree seedling poppers etc. I continued work for the rest of the day including potting on, potting up and seed sowing.



On Tuesday morning I started at the nursery with David and then later on in the afternoon he dropped me at Workpower nurseries where I met with Brett Darovic. Brett's establishment looks quite similar to a few pot plant nurseries here in South Africa. On the tour of Workpower nurseries I saw some interesting machinery such as an auto seeding machine, a planting machine as well as a transplanting machine which had me drooling as I wondered of all the possibilities we could have if we had a machine such as this.

On Wednesday morning we left the house early to travel 50km north of Perth to the town of Muchea to meet with Natalie Vallance of Muchea Tree Farm. After David dropped me off I would further travel with Natalie to go gather cuttings from her mother stock farm. Muchea Tree Farm deals in the propagation of Australian native plants as well as Proteacea sp. Immediately when I arrived at the mother stock farm I got a nostalgic feeling of home, being amongst bushes of *Leucadendron sp.*, *Leucospermum sp.*, *Protea sp.*. The mother stock on the farm is left to grow as it would naturally and not maintained in any way. There were also beautiful specimens of *Banksia sp.*, as well as *Eucalyptus sp.* that she grows for the cut flower industry.



Off to Dermot in Melbourne

On Thursday morning after a quick goodbye at the nursery at Natural Area I boarded my flight towards Melbourne where I arrived to meet with Dermot Molloy from the Melbourne Botanical Gardens.

On Friday morning we set off for Cranbourne Botanic Gardens where we met with Mandy who is the horticulturist at the gardens. The garden features a vast layout of different landscapes. It is considered a young botanic garden in that it was officially opened in 2006. You can tell this by the low canopies of the trees.



Later that same day we headed off to Tissue Culture Australia (TCA) where we met with the production manager Fiona. The size of production being carried out there was quite impressive and they had quite a reputation as the go to company for tissue culture in Australia.



On Saturday morning we had scheduled to slot in a visit to the Melbourne Botanic Gardens before I would head off to Tasmania. Compared to Cranbourne Botanic Gardens this garden is older and better developed in the size of the trees. There are fantastic landscapes that pay homage to the different plants that are found in Australia as well as the rest of the world including South Africa. After the visit at the garden we headed off to the airport where I was off to Launceston Tasmania.



Arrival in Tasmania

The Australian IPPS pre-conference tour would kick off in Tasmania. I met with the organisers Tony and Rose Van Der Staay of Westlands Nursery. Unlike the two gentlemen before, this was the first time that I had met with either Tony or Rose and they were quite pleasant in welcoming me to Tasmania. The Van Der Staay's had rented a quaint tour bus that we would be using for the tour. After the secretary of the IPPS Australia; Pam had landed, we went off to the Hotel for the evening where many others who had come for the tour would arrive.



Pre-Conference Tour

Day 1

On the Sunday we went to visit Habitat Nursery which is quite close to the mountains. The nursery setup at Habitat Nursery is one of the strangest setups for a retail nursery that I have ever seen in that you feel as if you are literally buying direct from Mother Nature. We went to visit some caves nearby which had some interesting features. In the afternoon we were in Sheffield the town of murals. Our night ended off at Tamar Valley Resort.

Day 2

On Monday we went to off to Tasmania's Seahorse World where we viewed seahorses, sharks as well as lobster. There after we went onwards to Bridestowe estate which is quite famous for its beautiful fields of lavender. It was really unfortunate that I stumbled up on it during maintenance season.

Day 3

We headed off to one of Tony's old protégés to view his nursery. Michael used to work for Tony and grows a large variety of ferns which he now sells even to Tony. After the nursery visit at Michaels place we went to visit the Bark Mill Museum. We made a quick stop at a sheep farm that doubled as a wine farm. We enjoyed a tasting of their premier white and red wine which we picked up to take with us for the conference end off celebration at Westlands Nursery.

Day 4



On Wednesday the last day of the pre-conference we went out to enjoy a Tasmanian island cruise to view the scenery of the cliffs and the shoreline. The boat trip was quite exhilarating and quite rocky as we sped over the ocean. The cliffs around Tasmania were quite breath taking and we even saw some dolphins swimming around the boat. We returned to shore for a quick lunch before we had to race to Hobart as we had a reception to attend with the Governor of Tasmania present and we had already been behind schedule from the boat trip.

Thanks to Luke Van Der Staay; one of Tony's sons, we made it to Hobart with enough time to freshen up. Short of saying the reception at the Governors house was spectacular it was quite glamorous and getting the chance to meet and converse with the Governor was refreshing, that and the part where I almost got taken down by her guard for unwittingly touching her to get her attention; lesson learnt '**DO NOT TOUCH THE GOVERNOR**'.

IPPS Australia Conference



On Thursday was the conference which had some very good talks from people who were quite prominent in the Australia horticulture industry. I had to present a short talk on what it is that I do in South Africa and in horticulture.

On Friday morning the conference continued with a few talks which were until lunch. After lunch there was an option to view either one of two different nurseries Granton plants and Plants of Tasmania. After the nursery visits we headed off to our hosts nursery Westland Nurseries, here we would take a tour through the biggest nursery in Tasmania comprising of its own retail and wholesale production.

In the evening as a celebratory end off to a great conference, the Van Der Staay's organized a great dinner celebration which had live singers and Tasmanian oysters as the focal attraction of the evening.

Tenure at Westlands Nursery

During the final few days of my trip in Australia I spent a couple of days at Tony's Nursery Westlands Nursery where I would work in production with the hopes that I could take some ideas back home. I got to work with Rose in cuttings production where I picked up some nice ideas regarding taking cuttings.