mixing it on the mesa
weeds seeds in the tropics
green thumbs for the brown times

May 2008
As I See It...

Oh for the good old days! Back when I was a lad, things were different: we had time to pull up on the side of the road and yarn with a fellow traveller; we cooked our own meals; kids lived at home instead of on the streets; we wrote letters; kids played on the streets instead of in the home; and we had a language that made sense – I think it was called English.

It’s funny how we all seem to hold a snapshot in time as a reference point against which we compare the world around us for the rest of our days. Is this point-of-truth cemented in our brains the day our dendrites and synapses lock in the lessons of youth, or is it a facsimile of our world on the day of some momentous psychosomatic event.

The reality is that our whole world is dynamic; nothing ever stays the same. Even language, as static as we may think it is – or should be – is in a constant state of flux. English was subjugated by French after the Norman invasion of 1066, but regained its ascendancy in its mother country around the 1400s. It retained the ‘useful’ French words beef, venison, veal and pork in much the same way as Americanisms are currently flooding – rather than creeping – into our lexicon, albeit for different reasons.

My grandmother was born into the horse and buggy days, before Marie Curie discovered, and was ultimately killed by, radioactivity. Grandma saw the advent of cars, powered flight, atomic bombs, moon landings, super-computers, nano-technology and ... peak oil. What will our world be like in five, ten, fifteen or twenty years? Who knows, but it will certainly be interesting.

The times, they are a changing.

The Editor
2010: Cooper and Co are celebrating: they’ve just sold their prime piece of western Queensland grazing land for a premium. Their success is built around their recognition of the importance of environmental stewardship and their willingness to embrace both the Delbessie Agreement and the weed audit program. Their philosophy of comprehensive planning and duty of care for the land has seen their country assessed as being in excellent condition. That, in addition to their Land Management Agreement with the State, and Indigenous Access and Use Agreement, led to their lease being renewed for fifty years.

When they came to sell their holding, they negotiated a sliding premium on the basis of an independent audit’s assessment of the weed status. So confident were they in the implementation of their Pest Management Plan, they even included a penalty clause for a less than claimed weed-free status. The subsequent independent weed audit confirmed their claims and made the assessment that the ongoing annual cost of maintaining the freedom from weeds was minimal.

2015: Stony manages one of the largest cattle stations in the Channel Country, in that age-old tradition, rises before the sun. His bailiwick is half a million hectares of floodplains and back-country grazed by high-quality, high-value steers; it’s dry, and starting to get hot but he’s got the stock well spread.

Water is the most important thing at the moment and Stony has thirty-seven artificial water-points to check each day … he has it finished by breakfast. His Aquarius III water-log runs fulltime on his laptop, and is linked to a homestead alarm, his mobile and satellite phones. Stony knows within 30 seconds of a failure or potential problem in the extensive ARMACS (Automated Remote Monitoring and Control System) of which the Aquarius III is the computerised monitoring and control component.

The balance of ARMACS is all hardware: solar panels, cameras, transmitters, sensors, valves, flow meters, gauges and pump starters. Stony has also married evaporation blankets and liners to get efficiencies in water use as well as maintenance.

Convincing his company to invest the required $130,000 to set up the state-of-the-art ARMACS was not the easiest undertaking of Stony’s management career. However, several pilot projects running around the region showed that the earlier technical hassles, and troubles with bird-proofing various hardware components, had well and truly been overcome.

The first six months had seen the system proved; now, two years down the track, full installation costs had been recovered through savings on fuel, vehicle maintenance and staff time. Stony now had two less staff to manage, his budget bottom line was growing, and he was now turning his attention to how he can implement a holistic, electronic stock management system, and make further savings.

2020: The O’Brien family are shearing. Three days ago they set panels and gates, and over the next twenty-four hours, the first two days of sheep went through the trap spears at the watering points and were directed into the laneway to the shearing shed. Yesterday morning they set the yard watering system running and programmed the drafting computer before bringing the mob up the lane to the yards. After lunch they ran the mob through the automated, implant-reading drafting-race which, with only Bluey and the dogs at the back, drafted the flock three ways based on information recorded on an implanted microchip.

Today the hum of industry is vibrating through the air-conditioned shed. Fleece weight and quality is recorded and linked to the animal in the central computer so that individuals can be culled on assessment criteria. Tallies record automatically as sheep leave the board and a running tally displays below the clock on a large screen which also shows inside and outside temperatures, news headlines, messages for the workers and … the lunch menu.

The shorn sheep are run back through the drafting race to be split according to weight, age and troubles with bird-proofing the earlier technical hassles, around the region showed that several pilot projects running...
Green thumbs for brown times

As we see the land drying off and rain non-existent, the last thing we want is our precious garden curling up its toes and giving up the ghost. This is where a well-planned, water-wise garden can go the distance when the water can’t.

Following on from last year’s successful workshops, we held a series of six ‘Growing Great Gardens’ workshops were held around the region. The aim was to provide knowledge and expertise to keen gardeners on how to get their garden to thrive in this challenging climate.

Pictured below left: Keen Barcaldine gardeners hanging on the wise words of gardening guru, Mike Chuk

Renowned landscape architect, Lawrie Smith, joined me and other DCQ staffy, Mike Chuk in delivering the workshops. Lawrie has a love for the west and encouraged gardeners to ‘design with nature’. Plants that live out here have adapted to its soils and climate and, while they might look scraggy out in the bush where they’re doing it tough, they can look quite different in your garden.

Our first workshop was held in Blackall in conjunction with the Heartland festival. This was followed, in rapid succession, by workshops in Longreach, Barcaldine, Bedourie, Boulia and Winton. Over 150 people attended in all despite the full local calendar that saw so many competing events.

Bedourie was particularly satisfying: 21 eager participants turned up mid-week with some travelling from Birdsville to be there. We worked on a garden design, incorporating elements from the region, for the new Information Centre. Our time spent with council gardeners will help them on the path to getting better results with less water. Each workshop also included a local garden diva – a district green thumbs who has been gardening successfully out here in this wide brown land for years. They shared techniques for getting a garden quickly established, how to have a fantastic lawn that is only watered once a week, what plants work and what don’t, how to deal with difficult soils, how to raise your own seedlings, and much more. Thanks to Kerry-Ann Dean, Mary Emmott, Greg Castle, Nookie Durack, Nell Brook, Elizabeth Clark and Barbie Scott.

Pictured below right: Boulia gardeners ready to ‘get in and get at it’ at their local workshop

Who better to expound on this subject than our evangelical garden guru, Jeff Poole ...
Weed Seeds in the Tweeds

No one likes to have weed seeds in their socks or pants, but weed seeds anywhere, anytime, was one of the hot topics in the tropics recently. DCQ’s resident weeds men Brett Carlsson and Ron Beezley were on the spot ...

Weeds have long been a major issue for land managers in the Desert Channels region, and DCQ has worked hard at delivering assistance across their one-third of Queensland bailiwick.

It’s probably not surprising that DCQ has grown into the weed control leadership role that it now occupies, and is continually being recognised for.

The many hours of work from the creative DCQ design and publishing team that went into posters, brochures and maps was rewarded by the reaction of the delegates. Many were blown away by the sheer size of the DCQ region and how we can service the area with so few staff. Not only did the display show the size of the region and the problem, it also showed how much of our work is ‘on-ground’, a fact that is a real credit to the way we do business.

As part of our sponsorship privileges, we hosted the Welcome Reception on the first night. This gave our illustrious Chair the opportunity to put across our key messages in his own unique style.

“We all need to get off our arses and work together’ and ‘cut through all the bullshit and get the job done on the ground’. These two quotes really grabbed people’s attention and made them sit up and take notice of the message and DCQ.

While the conference itself was very informative, dealing with topics from new threats and new technologies in biocontrol, to innovative practices and understanding the invader, the real benefit was the networks and contacts made with many people such as researchers, chemical companies, and government agency staff and ‘weedy’ people from all over Australia.

It was also great to put faces to names that we’ve been on the phone or e-mail to for sometimes up to a year without actually meeting them. Having these contacts allows us to learn and work together, and even educate some on what we do so well.

The conference was a great success for DCQ and … there’s some good fishing at Cairns!
Recently, I had the privilege of spending a weekend with a diverse mob of fifteen people traipsing over a remote mesa in western Queensland. I was there with representatives from the Guwa (Koe-a) Traditional Owner Group and The Australian Age of Dinosaurs to participate in a preliminary Aboriginal cultural heritage survey of the site of the proposed Australian Age of Dinosaurs (AAOD) Museum of Natural History.

In 2006, the Britton family of Mt Landsborough generously donated a 1500 hectare mesa under freehold title to the AAOD for the development of their museum.

DCQ staffer and local Aboriginal custodian, David Thompson reports on the first steps of journey of discovery and respect, walking in the footsteps of an ancient culture and prehistoric creatures ...
Saturday began with an early breakfast and discussion on how the survey would take place. At first, people were a bit stand-off-ish but, as time went on, everybody became familiar with each other, and shared and learnt much. The proposed construction sites were spread over the mesa with the aim of strategically placing the buildings to minimise the impact on the environment and the mesa and, after a briefing on where, what and how, we started traipsing across the mesa, teaching and learning about Aboriginal artefacts, sites and culture.

The first survey area showed some signs of previous Aboriginal habitation and many artefacts called 'flakes' and 'discards' or 'throw away'. It was a time that people became friends, shared their culture and enjoyed each other’s company.

Another survey area yielded a 'snake tree', a Snappy Gum that had grown along the ground in a snake-like form before heading skyward. During this time another tree was identified to be a special Women’s Place, and the Guwa women shared the story about the Place with the women from the AAOD.

We then travelled to other sites around the mesa to perform more preliminary surveys on potential construction sites and discussed the process of conducting more comprehensive surveys in the future. It was very evident that the Guwa people used the mesa and that with further investigation; we would find more significant places to record and protect.

At the end of the day everybody was both enthusiastic and exhausted. Enthusiastic with what we had found, especially the Women’s Place and what a future and more detailed survey would present; exhausted from walking, talking, laughing, climbing, eating, sitting, learning, teaching ... and swatting flies.

All involved expressed their honour and privilege to be a part of the survey work, and all expressed a keen interest to be involved in future cultural heritage surveys and sharing more experiences with each other.

Not only did Desert Channels Queensland provide funding to fence the mesa and remove feral goats, we recorded the survey day and will produce a DVD. We will also begin working with the Guwa Traditional Owners in recording their heritage, history and culture.
DCQ Update

It’s getting uncomfortably close to that frenetic, end of financial year with its attendant project acquittals, financial spreadsheets and Annual Report … and, on the private front, the dreaded tax return.

We have just completed a series of six arid gardening workshops around the region, from Blackall and Barcaldine to Bedourie and Bouria, with Longreach and Winton thrown in the middle. These popular and well-attended sessions are a continuation of the extremely successful series from last year and feature plant selection, watering equipment and techniques, mulching and layout with tips from noted garden designer, Lawrie Smith (see separate story).

Our Aboriginal Advisory Panel, which provides the Board with feedback and input, has endorsed our Aboriginal Engagement Strategy. This strategy guides how we ensure that Aboriginal people have their say and participate in the management of the region’s natural resources. The most recent meeting was heavily attended by women and saw Pat Hegarty, a Guwa Traditional Owner, elected as Chair.

The latest in a string of field days across the region were two Peter Andrews, Natural Sequence Farming days (near Longreach and Aramac). While the concept may not seem immediately relevant to this part of the world, the days were well-attended and people came away with plenty of valuable information. Another field day that attracted people like flies around a carcass was the WaterSmart™ day at Monkira Station out on the Diamantina (see separate story).

Also featured in another story in this issue is the cultural heritage survey of the mesa where the Australian Age of Dinosaurs is to build its museum. Our previous involvement with this site was to fund a project to fence off the area and remove feral goats; we are currently producing a DVD of the cultural survey; and will continue to work with the Guwa people to preserve their heritage.

Many of our on-ground team are still out and about, some delivering training and others on site visits and project acquittals; we are also funding and coordinating extensive weed control work through the Defeating the Weeds Menace and Blueprint for the Bush programs. This is a large-scale, region-wide undertaking for the strategic control and eradication of mesquite, parkinsonia and prickly acacia.

Our contractors for this work have as many as 20 people in the field spraying at any one time.

Recently, we’ve sponsored two national conferences: National Floodplain Association conference in Windorah; and the National Weeds Conference in Cairns. The Windorah conference dealt with floodplain over exploitation and degradation through much of eastern Australia, and the need to protect our inland river systems from the pressure to irrigate. The Cairns conference covered everything weeds and provided DCQ with tremendous exposure through our highly patronised display that showcased our leadership in survey, training and control.

And don’t forget our major date-claimer: Westech Field Day, 9th and 10th of September in Barcaldine. Make sure you come and see us at our Supa Site – more details in the next issue. See you there!

Some of you who have heard of the Cooper’s Creek Catchment Committee may be wondering what it does. Are we a bunch of greenies hell bent on saving some obscure tadpole? Or are we just anti-irrigation antediluvians? Well … neither.

The committee is there for the whole of the catchment community, whatever their views. We’re a community group with representatives from all industries who care about the future of the area. Our members are grass-roots people trying to better the community they live in for landholders and local communities, whether that be tackling issues such as telecommunications, pests, river gauges and of course the health of the creeks and rivers that make up the Cooper’s Creek catchment.

A list of our current committee follows. Only Mike Price and Maree Morton are old hands, the rest are first-time Committee members.

Mike Price, ‘Marengo’, Aramac (Aramac/Cornish)
Nicholas Walker, ‘Rio’, Longreach (Upper Thomson)
Leonie Nunn, ‘Sunnyside’, Stonehenge (Lower Thomson) – CHAIR
Michael MacKay, ‘Hotspur’, Jericho (Upper Barcoo)
Jim Markwell, Isisford (Lower Barcoo)
Matthew Barrett, ‘South Galway’, Windorah (Upper Cooper)
Maree Morton, ‘Innamincka Station’, Innamincka (Lower Cooper) – DEPUTY CHAIR

Meetings are open to the public and anyone in the catchment who would like to raise an issue is encouraged to contact the Committee Chair, Leonie Nunn on 07 4658 9155.
I was one of a number of non-local ring-ins who travelled the dusty track to Monkira Station for the WaterSmart™ Field Day, held on a glorious day in early April. The grassy enclosure between the Cookhouse and the Homestead was an invitation to all graziers to come and look and enquire. There were tents and marquees, a tank, pink cattle prods, solar panels, telemetry bits and pieces, Westpac and DCQ.

Our very own Colleen James, WaterSmart™ Pastoral Production Project Officer, gave an informative and interesting account of the Monkira project as well as other projects in South Australia and the Northern Territory.

It was dusty. It was flat and dusty. The flat and the dust went for miles - right to the curve of the earth. The dust that swirled as the convoy of four-wheel-drives snaked its way to each water point hung in the air for many thick and heavy minutes. I wondered what the resident herd at Carbines waterhole and the two corella scouts at Pullawarra waterhole thought as they observed it all with aloof indifference, this invasion of their tranquillity.

As Anthony explained at one point, it was not all plain sailing during the trials. He candidly spoke on the reliability of the chosen equipment, problems that arose, and how they were addressed. Even for the city slickers and young, it was fascinating and informative.

A range of technologies and products, ranging from the Observant telemetry system, the E-Vap Cap evaporation control cover, Grundfos solar pumps, Bushman’s tanks and Dinocrete concrete troughs, were trialled at ten of Monkira’s water points under the supervision of manager; Anthony Desreaux. Anthony very enthusiastically showed us around, explained what was installed at each water point and handed over any technical questions to the manufacturers who accompanied us on each dusty leg of our inspection.

Future plans at Monkira include replacing the existing flow meters with an ultrasonic meter that has no inline obstructions. The internal diameter of the pipe will be retained; hopefully this will eliminate the major problems experienced with blockages.

Desert Channels Queensland is a partner in the WaterSmart™ project which is run by Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre and funded by the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program. More information is available at: www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au/watersmart/field_days/monkira_station_field_day.html

Pictured below: From all points they came; In all modes of transport; To look at troughs, solar panels and pumps; And anti-seepage liners.
Qwalc Quoll Query

At the beginning of April, reports were circulating that a sub-species of Australia’s well-known native cat had been discovered in the Desert Channels region. While no photographs or specimens were collected, the animal was reportedly identified by Latvian environmentalist and researcher, Day Vid Hattinburrow. Mr Hattinburrow, of mixed Latvian and English descent, is studying the distribution of species as reflected in email traffic content.

While he declines to divulge how he accesses emails to study content and volume, Mr Hattinburrow is certain that he has found a quoll sub-species in sand ridge country to the west of Longreach and says it is known as the qwalc in the local dialect. He further claims that it has a peak-shaped body. Like any investigative reporter worth their salt, I set out to shed light on this mystery in the Bullet’s back yard.

One sand ridge resident, who declined to be named, said the whole thing was rubbish. “Even if it was true, we don’t want any new species; we have enough trouble with the ones we’ve got.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”

When asked if she’d ever heard of a qwalc, Elizabeth Clark of Leander simply laughed. “Sure, I’ve heard of it,” she admitted. “I’ve heard of it from Mr Day Vid Hattinburrow, who I’m told is a Latvian researcher.”
First impression: green. Second impression: water.

A million, million shades and shapes and textures of green – hills against sky, grass beneath wind, conifers against conifers; layers of forest, layers of lichen, waves of fern; fields of corn, acres of pasture …

And water – an extension of green, an extension of sky, with deep and beautiful layers of its own – lakes, rivers, streams wherever you turn, the ocean always within reach. Water of such volume, such pressure, such abundance that, to my dry western Queensland hide, is gluttony. I am overwhelmed!

This is not a gentle landscape, but it is strikingly beautiful … and far more forgiving than mine. I am horrified by the devastation of native forests, the thousands of acres of plantation timber and the totality of the destruction following this harvest. It’s as if the kiwis remake their landscape at whim: ‘this shall be forest; no, this shall now be pasture; no, it will be forest once more’. In an amazing generosity of spirit, Nature responds, grafting human scars with green, again and again.

Third impression: this takes longer to impact but reaches deeper. The earth beneath my feet is alive – not only the layers of vegetation, the turned soil, the rocks – deeper than that. I become aware of wafts of sulphur, strongest in the hours before dawn, drifts of steam; gouts of steam.

I learn to look and listen for it, away from the beaten tourist path: a heaving and groaning from deep beneath; fissures running in a staggered line of bubbling mud; boiling pools; the gently persistent burst and gurgle of pressure; and unimaginable heat and power. I begin to feel the old, old spirit of this place – to feel the truth of legend and mythology.

I am living in a small city strung along the edges of the lake of a not-so-ancient volcanic crater. The people are warm and generous of spirit. The ancient layers of geology and of human history are given respect and acknowledgement. There is no way they are going to be swept and hidden under neat cappings of concrete and bitumen. My heart is caught.