



Nature Trail

Enjoy the wonders of nature in the Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve

Where is the Nature Trail? The Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve Nature Trail is adjacent to the Highfields Cultural Centre in Crows Nest Shire, north of Toowoomba. When driving along the New England Highway through Highfields, look for and follow the signs to the “Cultural Centre”. The start of the Nature Trail is on the right just after you turn into the Cultural Centre entrance road (which is called Community Court) from O’Brien Road. The Nature Trail can also be entered from the back of the Cultural Centre.

Why is the Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve important? Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve is one of the last remaining patches of bushland in the Highfields area and has been identified as an “endangered” ecosystem under the Queensland *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. Although isolated from other areas and comparatively small, this Bushland Reserve protects a representative sample of the forest that once covered the Highfields area. Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve also provides vital habitat for a range of important native plants and animals.

Recognising the significance of the Bushland Reserve, Crows Nest Shire Council is actively conserving and managing its values.

Charles and Motee Rogers

Charles and Motee Rogers were Toowoomba residents well known for their musical talents. They donated the Bushland Reserve to Crows Nest Shire Council in the early 1990’s, and bequested the remainder of their Highfields property to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Charles and Motee Rogers Park celebrates their considerable generosity.

Walking the Nature Trail. This Nature Trail guide takes you on a half-hour journey through the Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve, with 10 sites of interest highlighted by numbered posts. You can walk the Nature Trail in either direction (it does not matter if you start with Site 1 or Site 10).

Site 1: Living on the edge. Look at how close the residential areas of Highfields are to the Bushland Reserve. What does this mean for the plants and animals in the Reserve? How do important animals like Bandicoots and Wallabies cope with pet cats and dogs?

Site 2: Where do these plants come from? Take a look around you at the large number of small and large shrubs and small trees. At first glance they might all look the same. But take a closer look... compare the shape and structure of the leaves and the colour and texture of the bark and you will see that there are actually many different species. Most of these understorey plants are more commonly found in a special type of rainforest called “dry rainforest” or “softwood scrub”. These plants can also be found in the understorey of eucalypt forest, as you see them here. They provide vital food and habitat for many animals such as small birds.

Sadly, the too frequent burning or overgrazing of forests has drastically reduced the amount of understorey vegetation in many areas. Some people also clear the understorey vegetation to leave just the big trees - this causes almost as much habitat loss as clearing the whole forest. The long-term absence of fire, grazing and understorey clearing in Charles and Motee Park has allowed the rainforest understorey to start to regenerate. If fire, grazing and understorey clearing continue to be excluded, the rainforest understorey will gradually be restored to mature habitat.

Site 3: Looks nice, but... The flowering daisy growing all over the ground behind the numbered post might look nice, but it doesn't belong here! It is actually a garden plant that is "exotic" - a foreign plant from outside Australia. Many home gardeners unwittingly plant "bad" plant species that escape into nearby bushland areas and become environmental weeds. Weeds cost the Australian economy an estimated \$3.5 billion a year in lost production and clean-up costs. Some gardeners actually make things even worse by carelessly dumping their garden waste in bushland areas! What you see here is the awful result!

Site 4: Something's different. Pause to compare the scenery in both directions along the Nature Trail. In one direction, the forest understorey is quite dense with numerous small and large shrubs and small trees. In the other direction, the forest understorey is relatively open with lots of grass and very few shrubs. The possible reasons for this include a slight change in soil type or soil fertility, or a slight change in soil moisture levels.

Site 5: When messy is good. The fallen logs you see beside the track provide vital habitat for animals like lizards and small mammals. What would happen to these animals if someone did a "clean up" of the Reserve and took away these logs? What would happen to these animals if someone took these logs for firewood?

Site 6: Living in someone else's house. Carefully study the forest canopy. In one of the trees you will see a black object with a hole in the side of it. The black object is a termite nest, and the hole in the side has been made by birds that have used it as a nest - in this case Kookaburras. Believe it or not, the birds and termites happily co-exist! This sort of inter-species relationship is surprisingly common in nature.

Site 7: Fallen giant. On the ground are the remains of a fallen tree. Look at the size of the base of the tree and the size of the remains of the trunk. Imagine how big and tall it would have been when it was standing. How old would it have been? Hundreds of years? Thousands of years? How many forest giants remain in this region?

Site 8: Hollow hero. Look carefully inside this grand old tree and you will see that it is hollow right to the top. Tree hollows like this provide essential roosting sites for many species of bats, birds and mammals. The loss and destruction of trees with hollows is actually pushing some species, such as the Glossy-Black Cockatoo, towards extinction. How can we protect these hollow heroes from being cut down or burnt down?

Site 9: The necessities of life. Look at the small grass-like plant next to the post. Then look a short distance away on the other side of the Nature Trail towards Site 10 and you will see a plant that at first glance looks the same. Take a closer look and you will see that they are actually two different species. The one near the post is the Saw Sedge (*Gahnia aspera*) and the other one is the Flax Lily (*Dianella longifolia*). These plants are just two of the many species used by Aboriginal people for the necessities of life including food, medicine, fibre and shelter. The seeds of the Saw Sedge were ground into flour, and the leaves of the Flax Lily were woven to make dilly bags and other materials.

Site 10: Over the top. The forest in the Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve is "eucalypt woodland". The dominant "canopy" species - the big trees - are all eucalypt species or related species. Have a close look at the trunks and bark of these canopy trees. Are all of the trees the same, or are there several different species?

Advice and assistance for landholders in Crows Nest Shire

Do you own or manage a patch of bushland in Crows Nest Shire? If you do, the innovative Crows Nest Shire NRM (Natural Resource Management) Program may be able to assist you with:

- *advice on bushland management;*
- *small grants for bushland management works; and*
- *rate rebates for bushland areas set aside through a conservation agreement.*

To find out more, visit www.CNnet.com.au or ring 4698 1155.

Thank-you for walking the Nature Trail. If you are not keeping this leaflet, please place it in the box at the end of the trail so it can be used again.

The Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve Nature Trail is an education and awareness project of the Crows Nest Shire NRM Program. Crows Nest Shire NRM Field Supervisor Steven Plant coordinated the development and construction of the trail, with input from Highfields Cultural Centre Manager Rod Neucom. Construction has been carried out by Mission Employment crews under the supervision of Owen Frost and Rod Gardner, and by the Crows Nest Shire NRM Work Crew comprising Douglas Ashford, Steven Carter, Alistair Crawford, Matthew Gower, John Morrison, Matthew Rebb and Malenna Sutton. The trail entrance signs were made by Trevor Hartwig and the numbered posts were prepared by Tom Spring. Crows Nest Shire NRM Officer Bruce Boyes produced this trail guide.