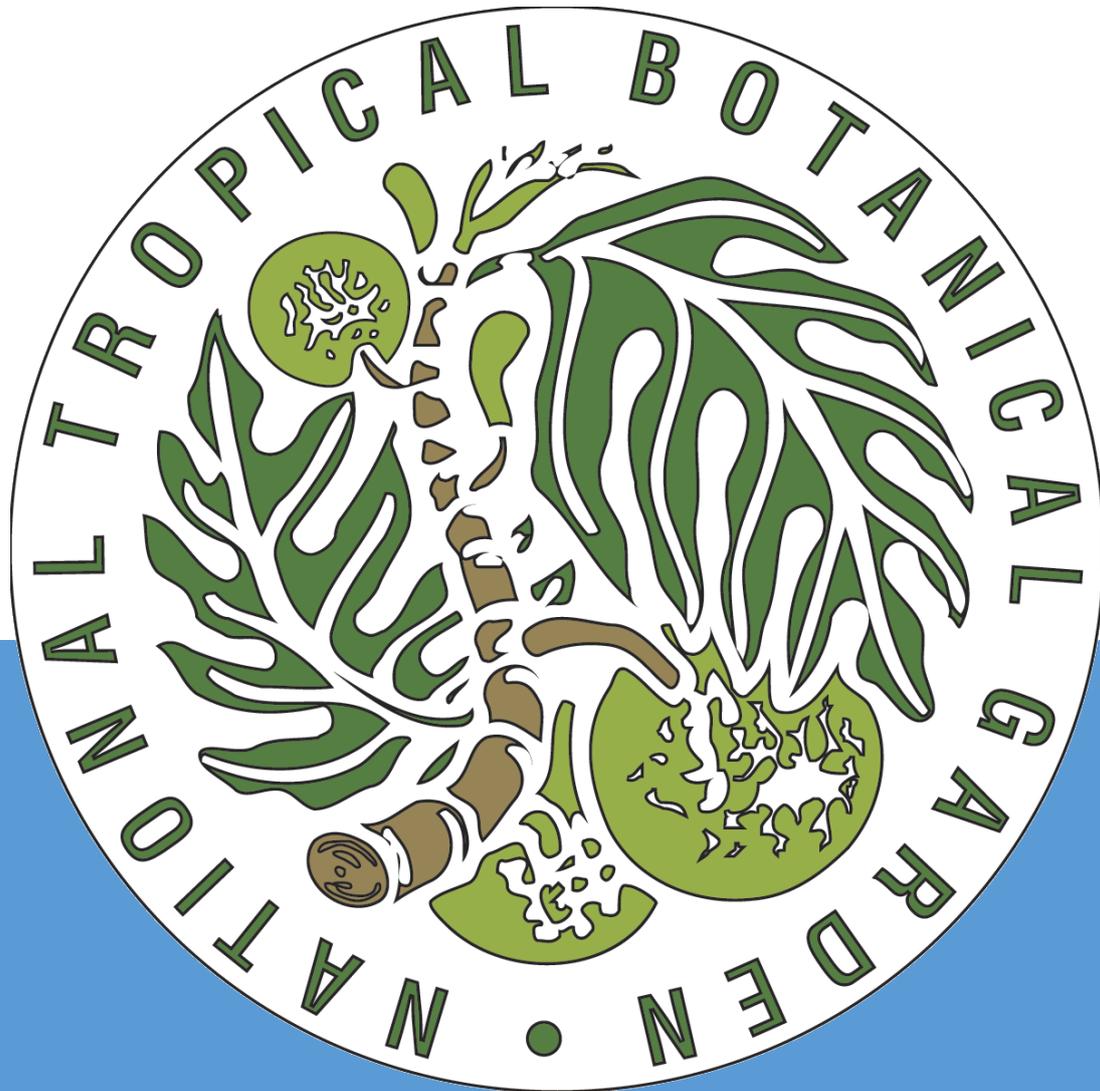


[THE NATIONAL TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDENS]



[A HORTICULTURAL INTERNSHIP]

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to the Amazing Ashley Trask and family, not only a brilliant plants person and ‘traskmaster’ but also lovely people for opening their home to us. Special thanks to The RHS, Merlin Trust and Nottingham Trent University who helped fund this eye opening expedition. Without the help of organisations such as these this expedition would not have been possible. It is with great thanks I write this report and I hope that they continue to be able to support worthy courses to achieve great things.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of this trip was organised by my good friend Ben Chester. Personally I believe I inspired him after having just returned from an internship to New Jersey. He took on the brunt of the work and always seemed to be well organised and at ease, it must be a trick, travelling and learning with him was a very enjoyable experience.

This report was compiled from diary and blog posts and is therefore very personal, for more of a scientific view on our expedition please read the report written by Ben Chester. We wrote in contrasting styles to try and showcase the most of our trip and what we learnt and experienced whilst there. For further information on the trip from me, other experience and my personal details please visit my website: <https://connorjdeacon.wordpress.com/>

Having a chance to sit down and reflecting on this experience has been long overdue, having been swamped with University work and work placements. It is almost impossible to not get swept along by the amazing sights at the time so personal reflection is important. In hindsight I believe this to be the most influential experience I have had and I will keep it with me for the rest of my life.

Contents

Title.....	Page Number
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Day 1 – LEAVING ON A JET PLANE	3
Day 2 – CHICKENS AND BEACH	5
Day 3 – FIRST DAY AT WORK.....	7
Day 4 – FERNS, PLANTS & PESTICIDES	10
Day 5 – SETTLING IN.....	13
Day 7 – SUNBURN AND SUSHI	18
Day 8 – THEY COME IN THREES.....	20
Day 9 – SLOW DAY	23
Day 10 – DIRT DIGGIN’	26
Day 11 – BREADWARZ, OR BREADFRUIT & STARWARZ.....	28
Day 12 – SUN, SURF, SEAFOOD.....	30
Day 15 – NEW STUFF AND OLD STUFF.....	33
Day 16 – SEEDS & GRASS	37
Day 17 – CAT CHASE.....	38
Day 22 – WHY’S IT SO WARM	39
Day 23 – PIE, TATTOOS AND WEDDINGS.....	43
Day 29 – PLANT PEOPLE.....	44
Day 30- LAST FULL DAY	47
Day 31 – THE END	49
WITH THANKS	52

Day 1 – LEAVING ON A JET PLANE

Early start, didn't sleep very well. Quick walk to the train station. Read my ferns book on the train. Got onto the underground surprisingly early, everything going well so far.

Checked in at United, took ages. Bag drop and then walk through security. Ben forgot he had all of his liquids and shampoo, everything, still in his bag. Straight in the bin. Bought some food and then changed currency.

Got lucky on the plane, it wasn't full so spread out and got a row each! Flight got delayed, only 20 mins or so for fuelling, yes we need that stuff!





Food on the plane was not good. British Airways they're not. Watched a couple of films and slept. Bridge of spies was pretty good. Then read some of my penguin books.



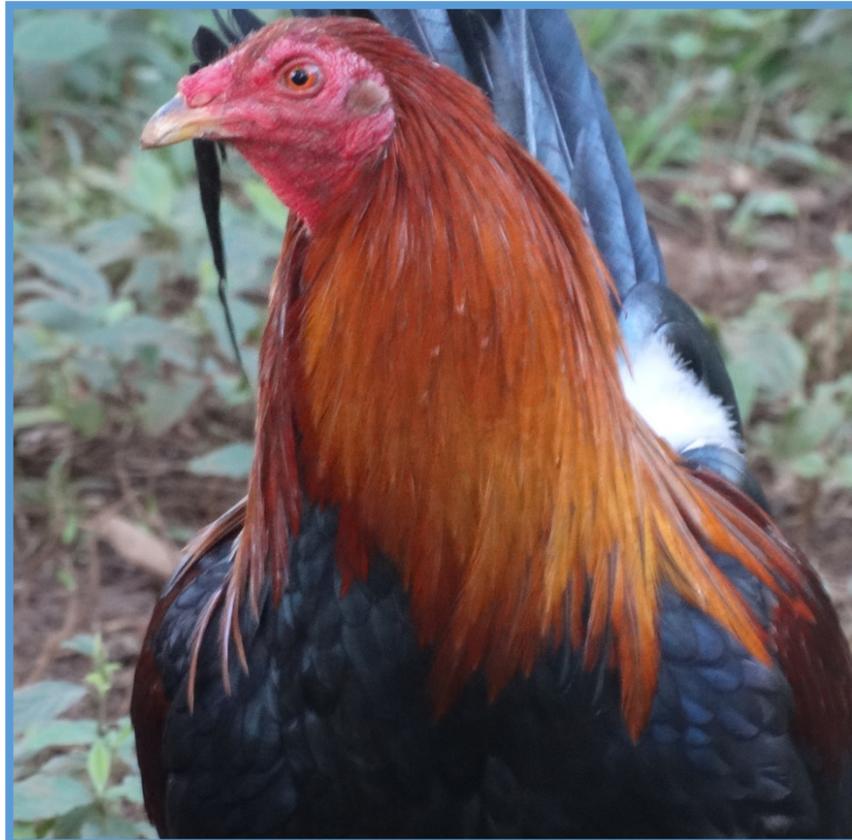
Still not quite sure what to expect. The social dynamic should be interesting, actually living with Ashley's family. Hopefully we'll all have fun. Don't think it's quite sunk in yet. Got the flight, after panicking and running for no reason. 5 hours. Slept most of it. Had the Patriots team on the flight? Which was interesting. Very loud.

Met Ashley off the plane! And we're here so that's my bit done. That was surprisingly easy. No mess ups yet. Got in, relaxed, chatted, then went bed and basically passed out.

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Day 2 – CHICKENS AND BEACH

Woke at 4AM by the chickens. This could get annoying really fast if it keeps up! The room we are in is really cool, it's Ashley's old art studio with Jessie's music room behind it. Also seem to have some guests, lizards, they're harmless.



Outside is a courtyard, with the chickens grr! They are currently doing up the bathroom so outdoor shower, we'll probably end up using religiously if the heat keeps up.



We went on a trip to walmart after breakfast. Met one of Holly's friends. They live in a yurt. How cool!.

Spent the rest of the day at the beach! Can't beat spending your first full day in Hawaii on the beach. It was amazing, absolutely stunning. Managed to lose my hat though, have to pick up another.



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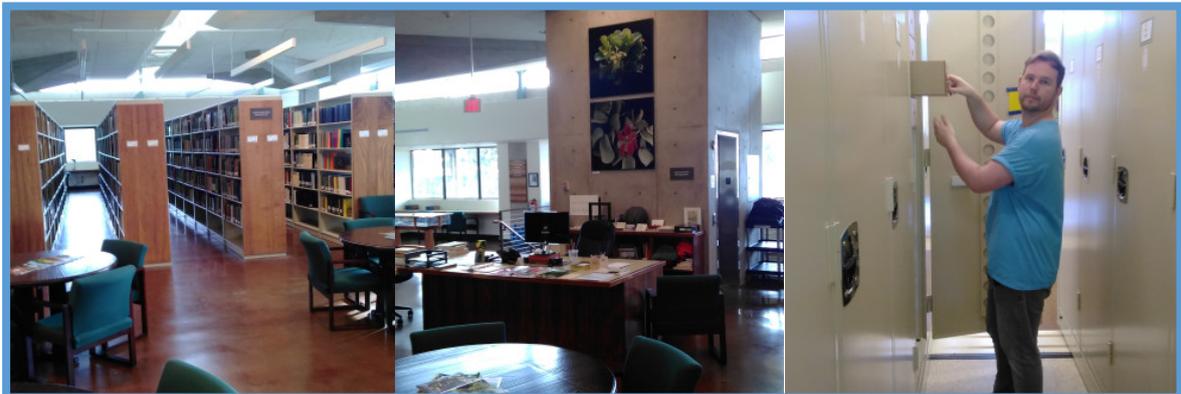
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Day 3 – FIRST DAY AT WORK

Dropped Kai off at the bus stop. 7 was the staff meeting. Explained what we should be doing. Quick introductions. The manager seems really friendly and nice. Hopefully get a chance to work with him. Should be interesting to see why some of them got into the job. Apparently over 60% of the islands workers are in council jobs as ground maintenance as the grass just loves to grow, and its BIG grass.

Set about on our first task, moving plants for the visitor's centre. Moved a range of different things, some looks familiar, others I couldn't even guess at. A variegated thing that looks like spider plant, a sweet potato, a number of different ferns and tree ferns and then a pink thing.



Drove up to the top and had a meeting with Tim, he is the collection administrator. Works primarily at the Herbarium. 65 Thousand Different species, including 400+ mosses, should keep Ben occupied. Then got let loose, took a tonne of macro photos of specimens.





Hopefully get an opportunity to learn how to mount specimens. They also have over 20 thousand books ranging from the 16th century.



Learnt the breakdown of the gardens and their spread over the different islands;

Our island, Kauai, holds two gardens. One on the North Shore, called Limahuli which is around 1000 acres. It is ridged on three sides by around 2000 feet. This garden is broken down into three different ecological zone and holds a vast number of endangered species. The upper preserve requires a helicopter to get to it! The lower, we will hopefully visit, holds the Malakai swamp trail and 800 ft waterfalls. Rather impressive!

Our Garden, Lawai, is on the southern coast. In contrast is only 50 acres large. It holds ancient archaeology, a lot of Polynesia plants that were introduced and is managed with minimal work.

The other gardens host a range of different ecosystems, the last dry forest ecosystem in the state, ancient sites. As well as a multitude of endangered plant species all threatened by invasive flora and fauna alongside the threats human expansion pose, such as climate change and land use.

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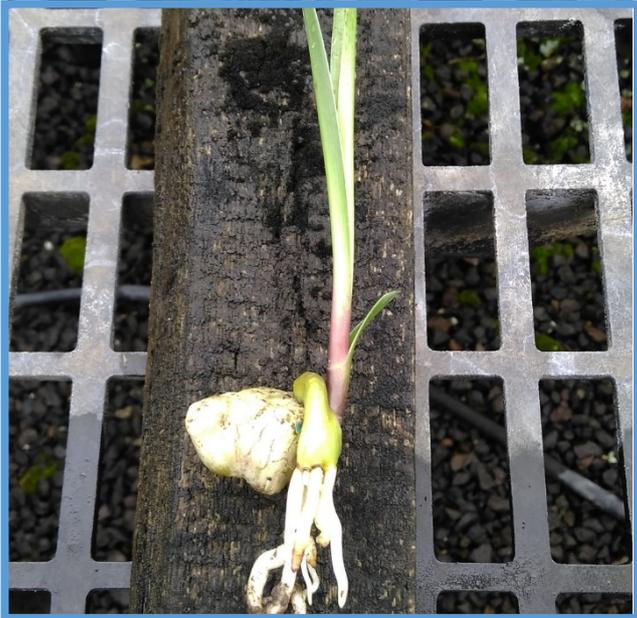
Day 4 – FERNS, PLANTS & PESTICIDES

Dropped Kai off at the bus stop. Staff meeting at 7. They have quite a good way of running the gardeners.

We started by trimming endangered ferns in the shade house. These are ones that have come back from the specialist fern lab in Estonia, have been grown on in our fern lab and then potted on to go out into their natural habitat. A long process for something that should be thriving, if it wasn't for humans.



Weeding under the tables lead to this thing,





Very cool seeds. Never seen one like those before. Ashley said it could be Agapanthus, strangest agapanthus seed I've ever seen but take her word for it.

Started to bleach and scrub down the floor on the pathway. It has moss growing all over it, Ben had to kill his best friend's haha. Then got called to help plant up the Visitors centre. First time we've seen the real soil here, and I can understand why light tops don't last long. It's the reddest clay I have ever seen and stains instantly. Placed out a range of plants.





The work ethic here is questionable. They all shovel lean a lot. I understand its warm etc. but they don't even want to break a sweat. There were 12+ guys planting out one border that must have been 40m, and sparsely planted anyway.

Then went back down, learnt how to take sweet potato cuttings and how they go about growing them on using old mound techniques.



Grabbed a late lunch and watched health and safety videos. Theirs are ridiculously extreme, due to them not having as many bans on chemicals as the EU. The difference in strength, and numbers of banned substances are rather incredible.

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Day 5 – SETTLING IN

The morning we cleaned the rest of the floor. It looked a lot better when we had finished, the misters made this a lot nicer as we were out in the sun and getting sprayed every now and then.

Collected and organised the plants that were going up for the plant sale at the new opening.



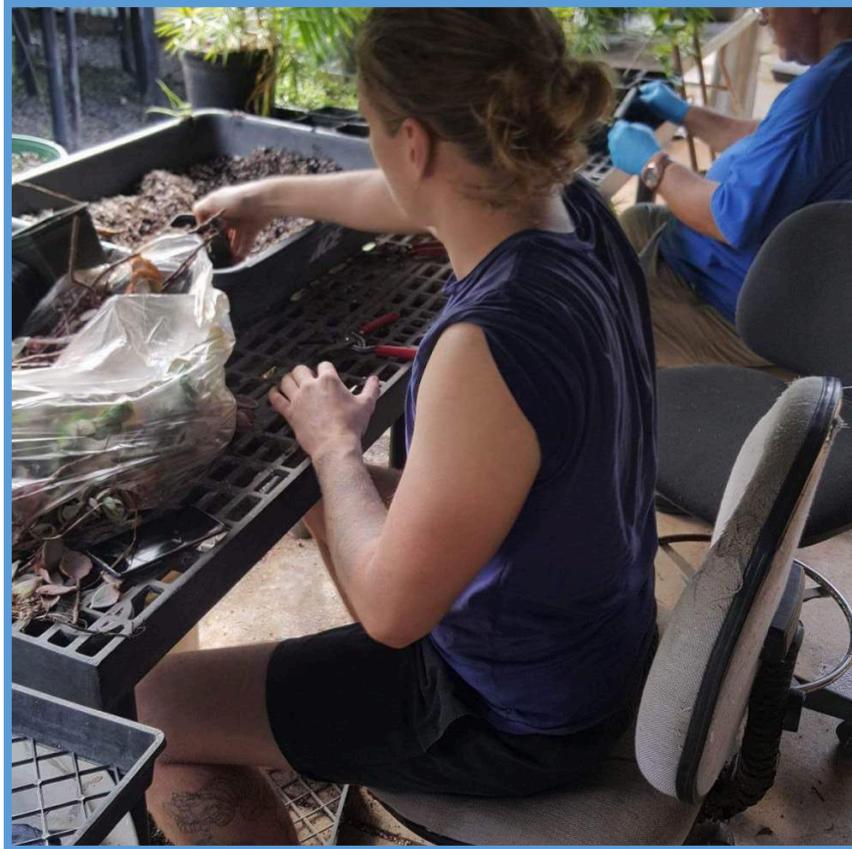


Learnt some really obvious skills that you don't think about or at least I hadn't. Consolidating plants before you move them, ensuring you have a full tray rather than 5/6 dead plants that have to come back down. All labels had to be kept to ensure they can be identified and taken off the nursery database.

Started 'Screw grass' Really cool! Showed how it worked when it gets wet. Can imagine it being very nasty on animals. Crazy we don't have it in the UK. One of those things you'd never imagine or think about until you see it in person.



Moved on to propagating cuttings of succulents. Creating about 8 flats worth of 3cm pots. The ease of propagating over here is also obvious. Things just like to grow.



Then went onto a walking tour for lunch. The garden is AMAZING! So impressive and beautiful scenery. It's a shame that so much of it is still over run. Could imagine it being an astounding place when it was first set up and looked after religiously by such a large quantity of garden staff. The beach at the bottom of the garden though! That is ridiculous. I can understand why they decided to have a 'summer house' on its shore.



On the way back up we walked past the Jurassic Park trees, photo time, obviously.



Got back and loaded the plants into the truck to take up for the sale. Easy way to finish a nice day. Drove up with Karma and unloaded, the new centre is really nice.

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Day 7 – SUNBURN AND SUSHI

Planned for a beach day today, so woke quite happy. Holly took Ashley into work as it was the visitor's centre open day. When they came back we packed up the cars with a multitude of gear. When Hawaiians got to the beach they really go to the beach!

Took off to the shops to pick up food. Grabbed some sushi, coffee and bug spray. The necessities right!



Ben got money out from the ATM. Got to the beach. Unpacked the cars on a perfect grass bank. Beaches here are the best. They have perfect set up spots and then perfect waves. Like they were made for relaxing on. Jessie turned up and set up a gazebo and got all the stuff out.

Really lazy afternoon, celebratory one week. Eating sushi and relaxing. Went for a bit of an explore with Kai clambering over rocks and under a bridge. Swimming was really nice. Water is always perfect. Shame none of the photos do the place justice.



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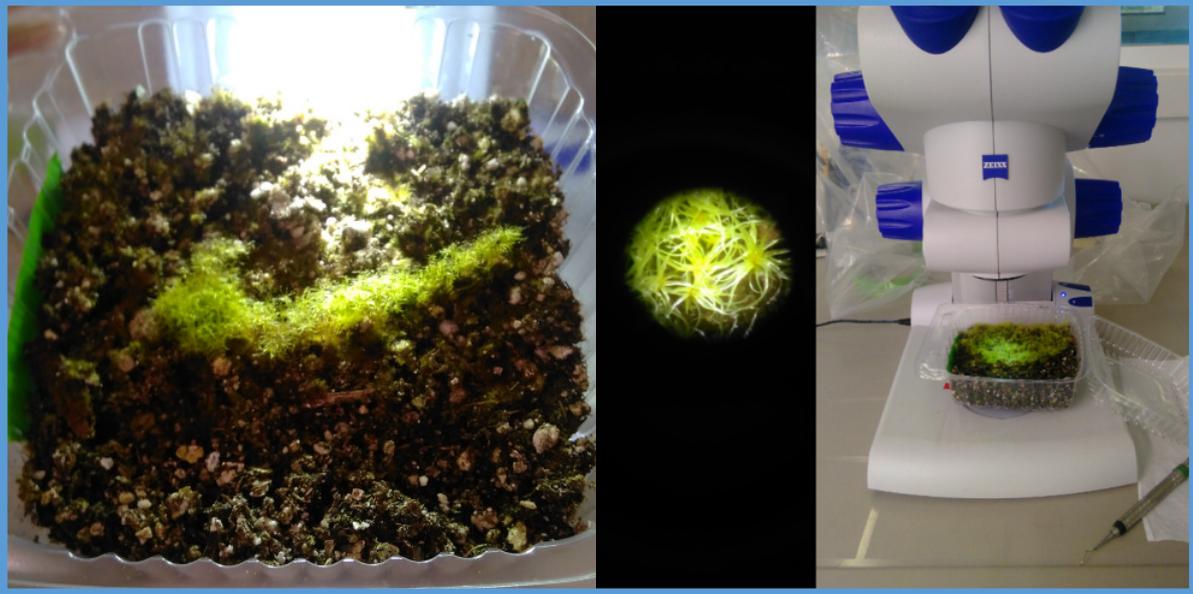
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Day 8 – THEY COME IN THREES

Woke tired. That was 1. We dropped Kai off at his bus stop for school and then the baby for her day care. Got in and got coffee on quick stuff! Went into the fern lab, put music on and weeded a Nike tick into the moss.





Lunch, we went to a volunteer event. Ben had to talk about Kokedama he had made, perked a lot of interest in the volunteers so may be running events on it another day. A walk up to the bio diversity tunnel. Honestly a little underwhelmed. It's been in situ for a year, people are paying to see it and yet it still looks like a pilot with no real purpose. Personally that was 2. Really upsetting and didn't enjoy it particularly, considering it was advertised as a fern haven and would be brilliant.





Back into the fern lab after and transplanted ferns. Labelled to ensure that they are track able during their growth time. That was until the end of the day.

Got home and then got the brilliant news that Ben's card has got copied. So that's 3. Causing all sorts of problems, having to move money from his account to mine for the rest of the trip. Considering we've only been here a week it's a bit of a blow. It could be worse. Now time for bed and fingers crossed tomorrow gets better.

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Day 9 – SLOW DAY

Spent the morning in nursery. Moving and organising the trays and spacing between plants. The new build has meant that the nursery was in a bit of a mess.

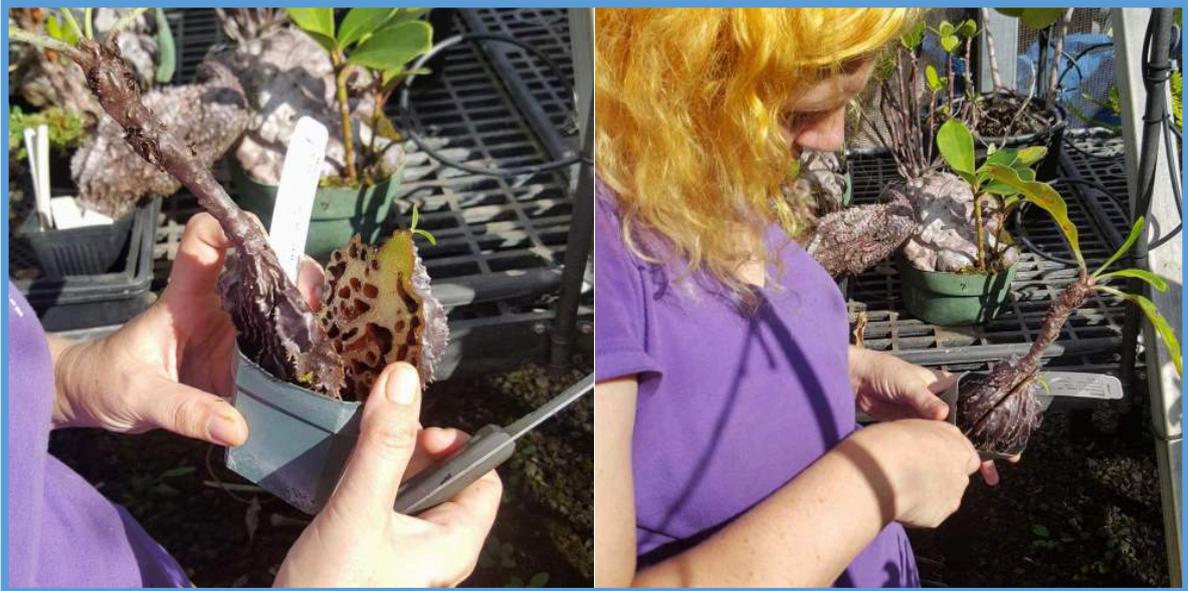




Then headed up to the Herbarium. Learning to mount the ‘vouchers’. Great opportunity and something new to learn. One of the volunteers was there so it was fun to talk to him throughout, relaxing and some great transferable skills.

Went back down to the nursery. Potting up some of the plants. Ashley explained the ‘ant plant’ which was very cool. Interesting to learn some of these plants that I’d never get to see in the UK.





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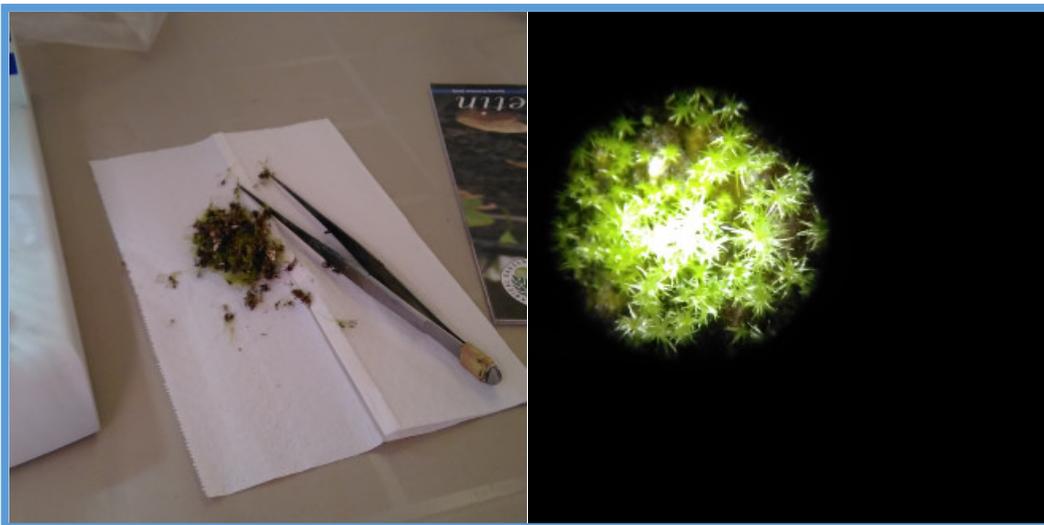
Day 10 – DIRT DIGGIN’

Long, long, hot, sunshine, hard day. Just to contrast with the lab work and educational side of our expedition. Spent the morning digging out the drainage ditch for the runoff water by the side of the nursery. Ashley fed us some lively take out breakfast, ‘chicken keeps you digging’ apparently. Hard, slow work. Broken up by Ben falling in three times and getting well and truly covered in mud. Just a shame I didn’t have the camera on!



Just after he fell in Ha ha

We completed about half of it and then Ashley pulled it. We finished and got showered, then spent the afternoon in the fern lab. Slowed down and relaxing.



Xmas party for volunteers. Really good and I won the best prize, which was rather funny. Really good food as well so, double bonus. Just after I had said that we had all better win food and the call my name out for a hamper full of cookies. Jackpot?!

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Day 11 – BREADWARZ, OR BREADFRUIT & STARWARZ

Coffee and Bagels for breakfast. Good start to the day! Spent a little while in the morning in the fern lab. Practice makes perfect on weeding microscopic moss from microscopic mesophytes.

The NTBG Social Media man turned up. Really nice guy, got a lift up to the Biodiversity Trail, he had 'here comes the sun' by The Beatles on. It's been in my head since leaving the UK, spoke for an hour or so. He took some photos and a video of the Kokodama that we were hanging in the mist tunnels. We then went about weeding the mist tunnel for the rest of the morning and then walked down for lunch.



The afternoon was out with 'The Breadfruit Guy' he was very interesting and clearly enthusiastic about the idea of what breadfruit can do for the world. Considering that's all he does on the side lines he had some pretty good ideas! Some interesting facts about breadfruit.



Finished the day off back in the fern lab. Living for the aircon after a hot day out and about.

Brilliant after work, ran off to Star wars. Had to dress up on account of Ashley being a super amazing Star wars fans. Cinemas in America are strange, they play a film (The Terminator) before a documentary (The Eagles on tour) before the film! Sat for about an hour and a half before Star wars started.



Good film thought! And great to watch with people that were hyped on it.

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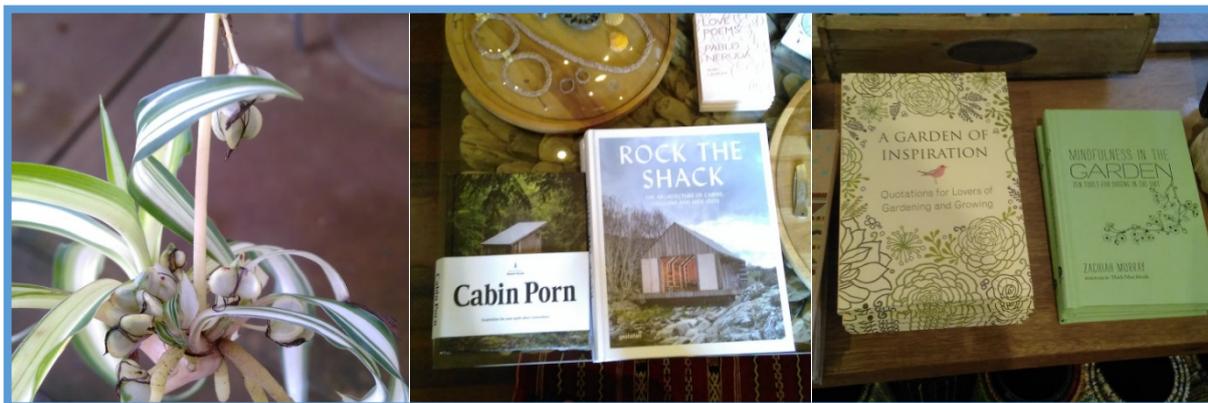
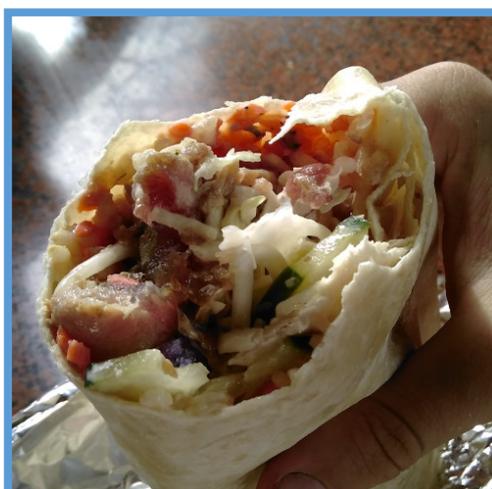
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Day 12 – SUN, SURF, SEAFOOD

Went along to Ben's Kokodama presentation. The realisation that we only have around 2 weeks left is crazy! The volunteers loved his work and enjoyed every second of it.

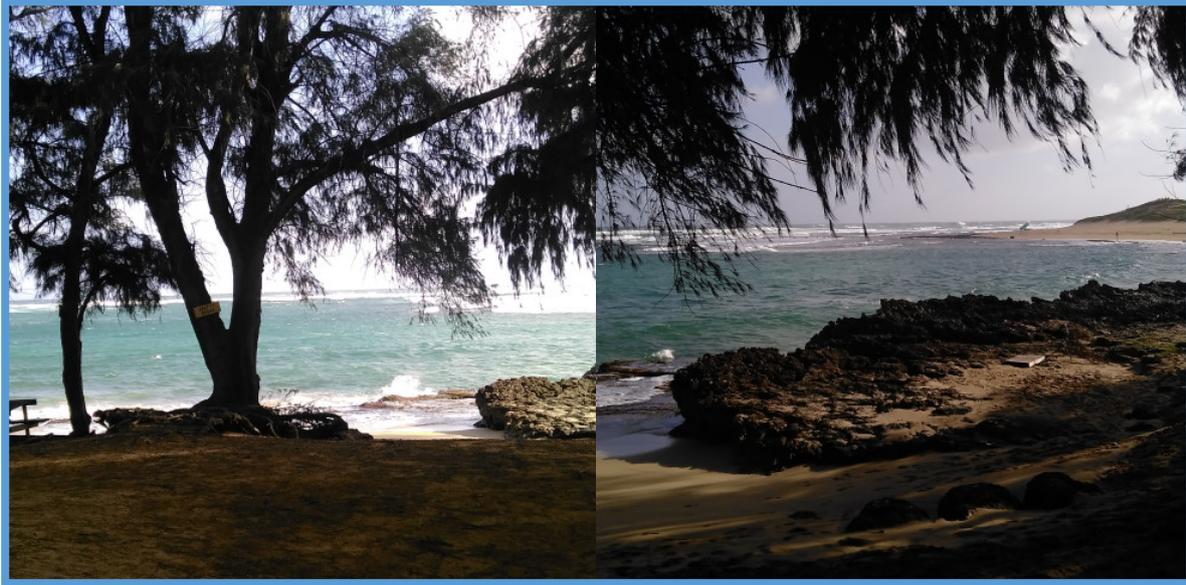
After we finished we went back to the house. To the north shore! All piled into the car and began our adventures. First stop was the most amazing food shop in history! It had been featured on Dinners, Drive-ins and Dives, for any of you food people. The Ahi wrap was a taste sensation, and massive. Also learnt that spider plants flower? Who in the UK knows that? I've had one since I was 5, how did I not know that they flower.



Then headed out, with full bellies, to the beach. Went to a couple that were amazing.



Attempted to surf but the board was short and the waves faster than Cornwall so didn't get up. A poor surfer always blames his tools. Great fun and nice way to start the weekend.



This one is where they filmed Pirate of the Caribbean!

Stopped for more food on the way home. Largest Pizza of my life, followed by some ice cream!
Mhmmm' murica.

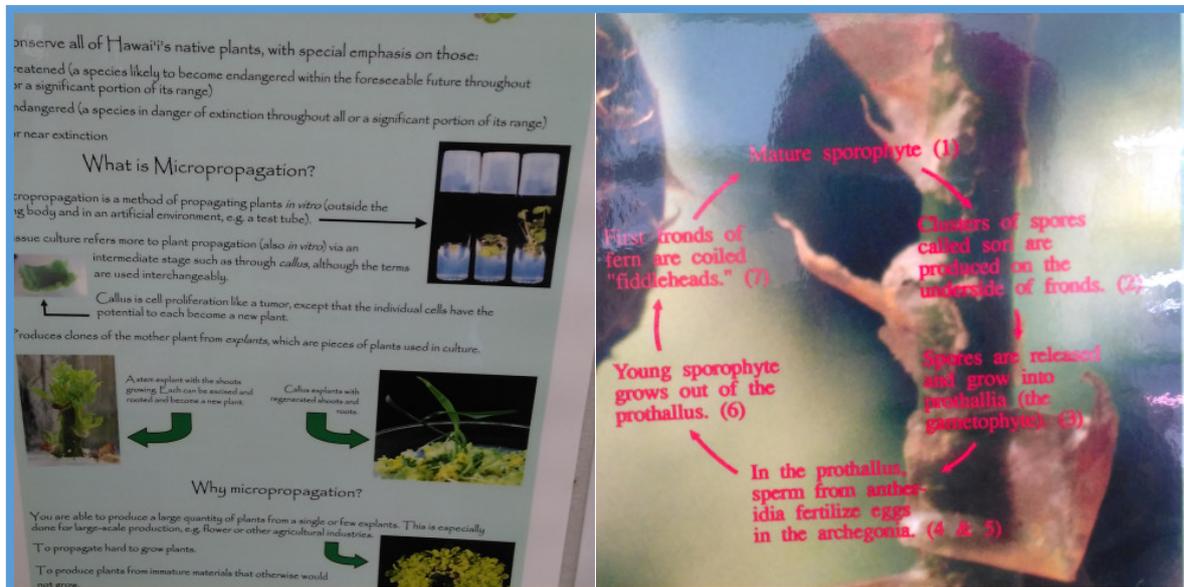
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Day 15 – NEW STUFF AND OLD STUFF

Woke this morning and went in. Spent the morning in the Fern lab. Ashley taught us to sterilize soil and pot on small mesophytes that has been sent back from half way round the world.

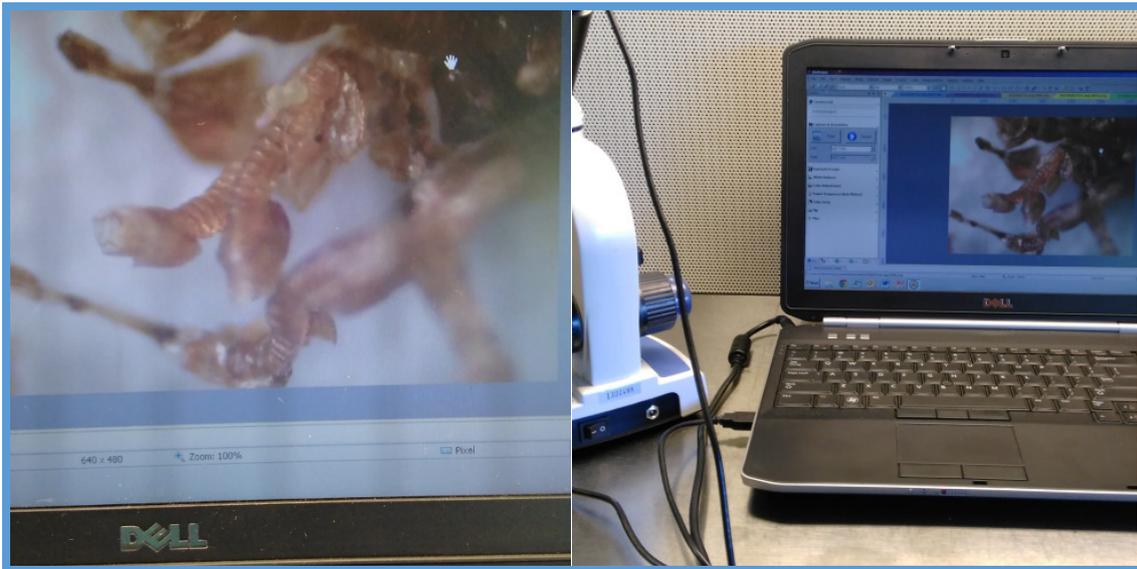


Be warned there's an obsessive rant coming, skip to next pictures if you don't want to read.

A large proportion of Fern species on the Hawaiian Islands are being made extinct. This has been exacerbated by climate change and the introduction of grazing animals, such as pigs, that have run rampant on the island. With Ferns being such an old plant family they have become almost overly adapted to their individual habitats, or micro-climates where they are found. This has happened to the extent that a fern found high in the mountains would never be found at sea level, and may not even be found on another mountain. It may only grow on that single cliff side in a 50m radius.

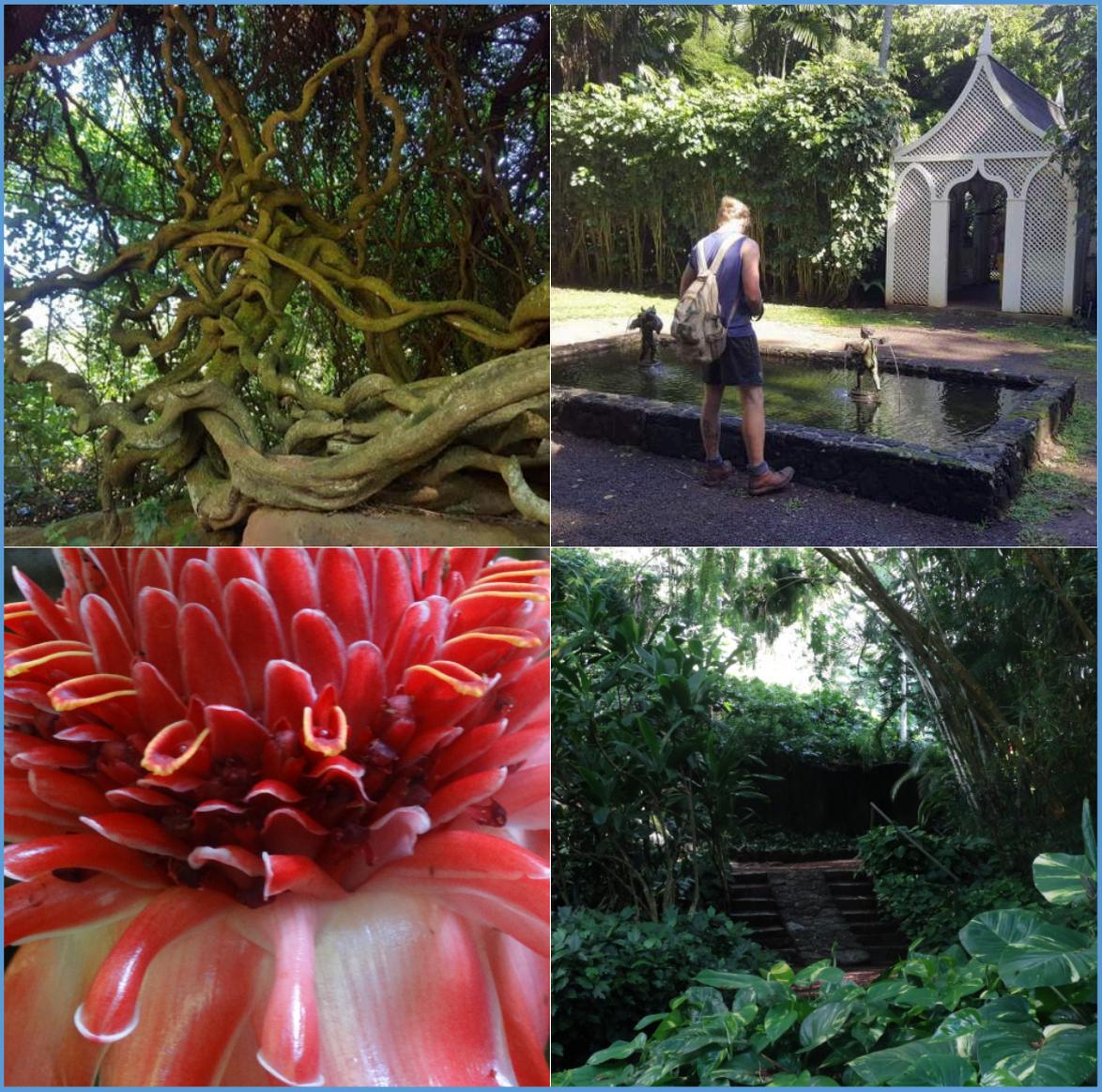
With the growing land use by humans on the Hawaiian Islands and affect we are having on the global climate these micro climates and unique growing conditions are being wiped out. This has led to fern spores being collected and shipped half way around the world to specific fern laboratories to be grown on, just to be sent back, in the hope of re introducing them. This fascinated me, with my obsession with ferns as a whole learning the extent of the damage we are doing by the destruction of habitat is crazy!

(Obsessive rant over) After having planted them in sterilized soil we then labelled each container so they could be tracked through growth stages. After they were potted on we started sowing our own spores, in an attempt to not send them half way round the world and back. Using a microscope hooked up to a monitor you had to open the envelopes they had been collected into. Each packet had to have pictures taken of the spores, to show they were in fact there and then collected onto filter paper and spread across the pot. More labelling to ensure plant growth could be monitored.



We broke for lunch, got luck with the volunteers and then a tour around Allertons. Having already done it with Ashley it was interesting to get a different perspective on the gardens. Spent

a lot of time with one of the old boys with the topics rambling (like bar conversation) through the changes in education, politics, food and sports. Alongside the un-interest of our generation with Horticulture, which was very interesting.





Then went up to the Herbarium. Tim greeted us and had some really interesting conversation. Definitely something I could do to relax. Especially being under Aircon with headphones in!

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Day 16 – SEEDS & GRASS

Went in this morning, seed duty, involved counting and scarifying the seeds that were to be planted out. This meant that they could be recorded and all growth or death rates tabulated



Used the compost mix that Kama created to fill flats for grass cuttings. They are going to be used to replant areas enclosed by pig proof fence. The introduction of pigs has devastated the natural flora.

Moved on to weeding around the quarantine bench. Then potted up cuttings, not quite sure what it was. It's the same as New York, learning all of the new plants names are crazy. It could take you a lifetime to learn the ones in a state, and then move to a new state!

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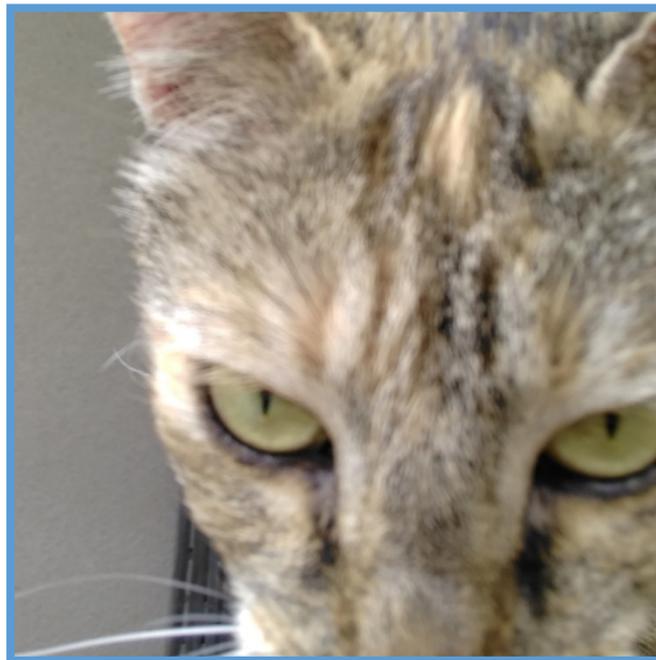
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Day 17 – CAT CHASE

Tidied the glasshouse today. Really good to see what you've achieved and actually make a difference. All of the potting beds were tidied and blitzed all of the indoors.

Pot luck for lunch. They out did themselves this week bringing in a astounding haul of food. Ate with chopsticks and thoroughly enjoyed all of it, such a variety. Went into the fern lab later and continued to weed. Helped karma create more potting compost, they use bricks of compost that is dehydrated and mix it with perlite and water. Cheaper to ship in as it weighs less. Found a free hanging basket. Lined it and then cut holes, using grass planted upwards to create a green ball. Not quite sure how it will work but it did look rather cool

Couldn't for the life of us find the cats?! Went on a real chase around the gardens and took us a good half an hour. Quite funny to find them chilling in the middle of one of the flower beds totally oblivious to the effort we had put into 'chasing' them.



Finished work and had a brilliant night. Went over to Allertons, the beach at the front of the botanic gardens. The sunset was beautiful and Jessie taught me to bodyboard with no board. Saw whales! Perfect setting and feeling to spot the first pod of the season. Even a full moon to cap it off.

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Day 22 – WHY'S IT SO WARM

Off to work, not there very long as we're off on an outing with the 'bird people'. Karma drove us over to get coffee on the way as we were early. Jokes about it being a bad movie, even the little village and Karma's car was the right stage setting.

Got there. Learnt we were supposed to be hiking the swamp trail. Regretted not having shorts instantly. We grabbed a quick coffee from one of the 'indy' coffee shops up the road, found these signs quite amusing;



We piled into a 4x4 and made our way up the side of the mountain. The trail had washed out, it was a slalom challenge to try and get to where they wanted to park! skid steering round corners we finally made it, parking off a remote trail we started trekking.

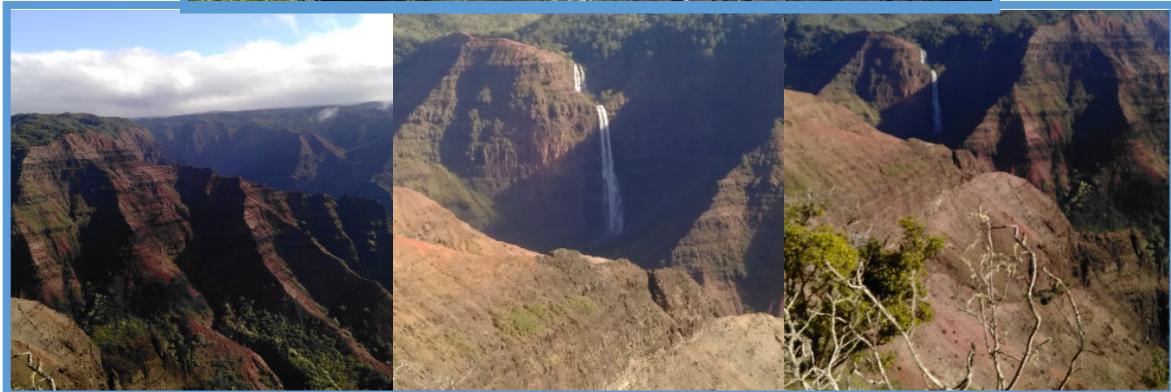
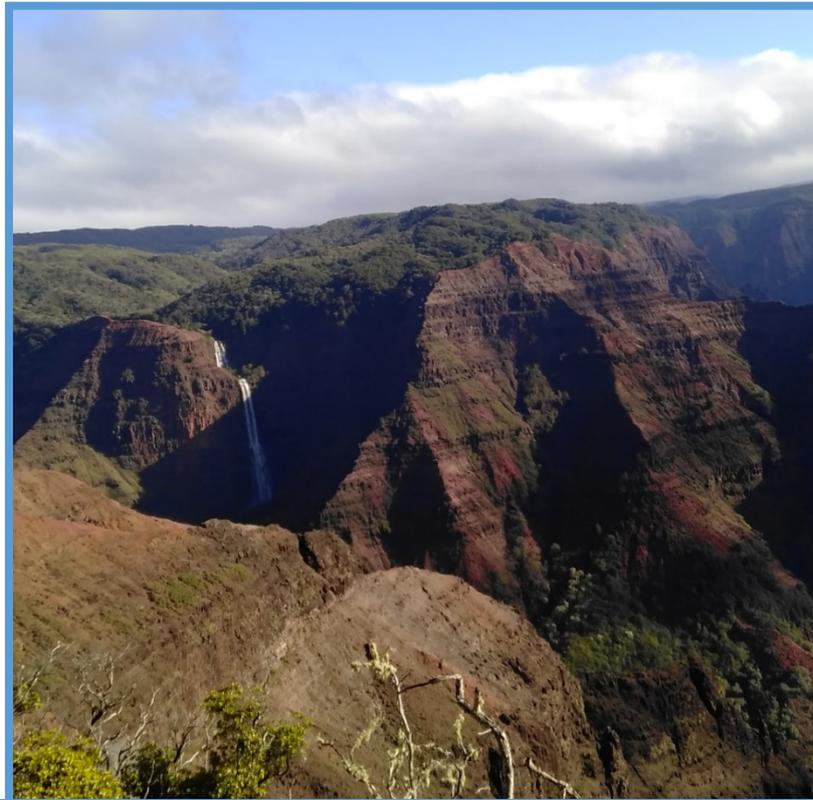


The flora was amazing. Native ferns with beautiful fronds. Beautiful moss for Ben that even I appreciated. The environment changes were also rather astounding. It felt like you were walking through crazy microclimates, from desert to mountain to swamp.



Something of note are the boardwalks, every trail has been boarded to ensure that people can walk without worrying about their footing too much. Which I think is amazing, but must have cost a fortune. Also worth noting is Ben's leg in the first picture. He had a woopsie when he fell off one of the boards and was swallowed by the swamp, wish I had the video on, it was rather funny.

On the way back down we stopped at the ‘Grand canyon of the Pacific’ which was equally as astounding.



Photos never do the view justice, nothing ever shows the scale or picks up the colours. Nothing ever looks quite as magnificent and amazing as the real deal. So, what I’m saying is, go to Hawaii!

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Day 23 – PIE, TATTOOS AND WEDDINGS

Bagel breakfast for the last time! The end of an era. Went into the fern lab and sprayed watered. A lot of them have dried out and died, honestly it's quite a sad way for them to go considering all the effort that's gone into attempting to save them.



Ben drove us up to the herbarium for the last part of the day. Trying to find native fern designs for my tattoo. Got a list the length of a major fern frond at the moment but no real outline designs. Sat outside in the sun while I waited for them to come back and pick me up.

End of the day brought pecan pie! Ashley birthday and a great perk. Super long time off now for her birthday and then New Year. Going to be so strange being away from home for it. But for now it's wedding time.

Went home and picked up clothes, jumped back in the car. Stopped at McDonald's on the way up. A long drive there.

Super amazing wedding, so intimate and cute with friends and family. Lovely to have been invited and I wish them all the happiness.

Now time for bed.

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Day 29 – PLANT PEOPLE

This morning seemed to disappear, must be because it was the last day in work. Spent it in the fern lab, got one last tray done before we leave.



Pot luck lunch. A nice send off from the rest of the volunteers. It's a shame I haven't got to spend as much time with them as ben and his kokedama classes but they are all so enthusiastic and lovely people.

Ashley had set up a great surprise for me this afternoon, out plant collecting with one of the resident plant hunters, Natalia. She's super awesome and we'd spoken a bit about plant hunting at the Christmas party so great to get to do.

We took off in the truck to collect a grass, strange thing to collect right. It's being used to replant part of a cliff face that is being eroded by the traffic on the road that runs along the top. One of the many things humans don't realise they're doing to impact the world. Alongside this was a berry, planned to be introduced to one of the newly pig secured areas. Hoping to help the native birds return to the area as they feed on the berries.



For this we went to the beach where Pirates of the Caribbean was filmed, the actual name escapes me. We had been up it before, where Sebastian, Ben and I climbed the other side of the cliff. No climbing necessary for this though as the grass is found on the sand dunes. Collecting enough for 100 cuttings each meant filling a bag each.

With the berry we climbed a little way onto the rock. Nothing as silly as what we had done when exploring though. It was great to hear the plans for the replanting. It's strange feeling how on both sides it is down to humans that there is a problem, the introducing of pigs, and the construction of a road.



Natalia was also great to be around a wealth of information, action on all of the plants on the Island as well as having experiences in other countries to. The afternoon made for an awesome last day and I learnt some good transferable skills for the future. She also talked about how you should become part of the church as they pay seriously well, as well as having great benefits and a lot of jobs going at the minute.

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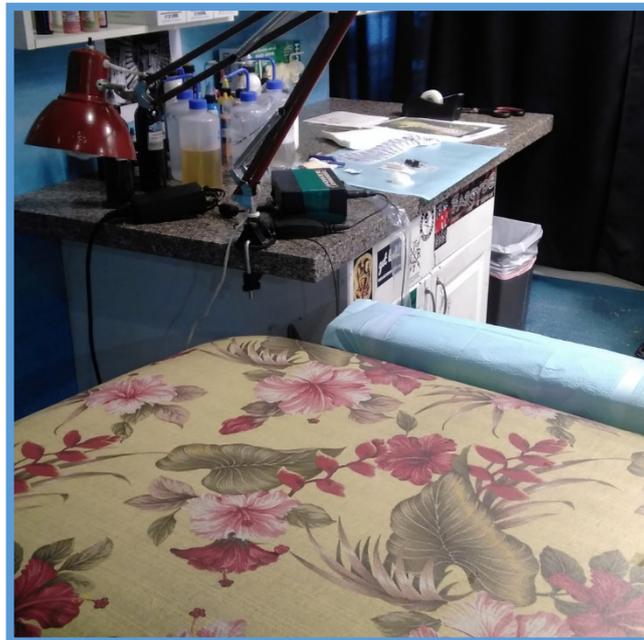
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Day 30- LAST FULL DAY

Woke to Ben leaving for work, he had to finish a few bits that he had left. I got a nice restful day. Showered and then began to pack and tidy. Tattoo day today! Adding to the rest of my sleeve with more flora memories.



Holly was ace and dropped me off. Arthur was a pretty nice guy. I was sceptical with the outline stencil he had drawn but let him crack on. Worked out pretty well in the end.



I even got a flowery bed!

Took about 3 hours in all which was more than I think he was expecting. He seemed pleased and I was so that's all that matters really.



Holly picked me up again. Got home and relaxed with the guys until Ashley and Ben got home. Quick run to the botanic garden shop.



Then all piled out to a sports bar, real America style. Beer and wings was a good end to a good last full day. Ate a looot of food, that's the way Americans do it! Was pretty nice too. All got back and watched some more x files. Finished a bit more packing then bed.

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Day 31 – THE END

Woke, showered, packed and tidied. Pancakes and scrambled eggs for breakfast.

Went out with Holly for coffee. Awesome place, re purposed warehouse that had been split into different sections selling a selection of goodies. The coffee shop was actually a small camper trailer, really nicely done. Got a hat that was actually the exact colour I was wanting. Better than the bright pink one haha.

Drove into a different town that we'd not been to before. Stopped and got food, a pokie wrap, wasn't as good as the dinners drive-ins and dives place was but was still pretty good. Went for an explore, Holly took us to The Orchid Alley, is what it says on the tin.



Some amazing specimens. Then went to a beach, where you could see the planes leaving, had a play on the park with Bowey.

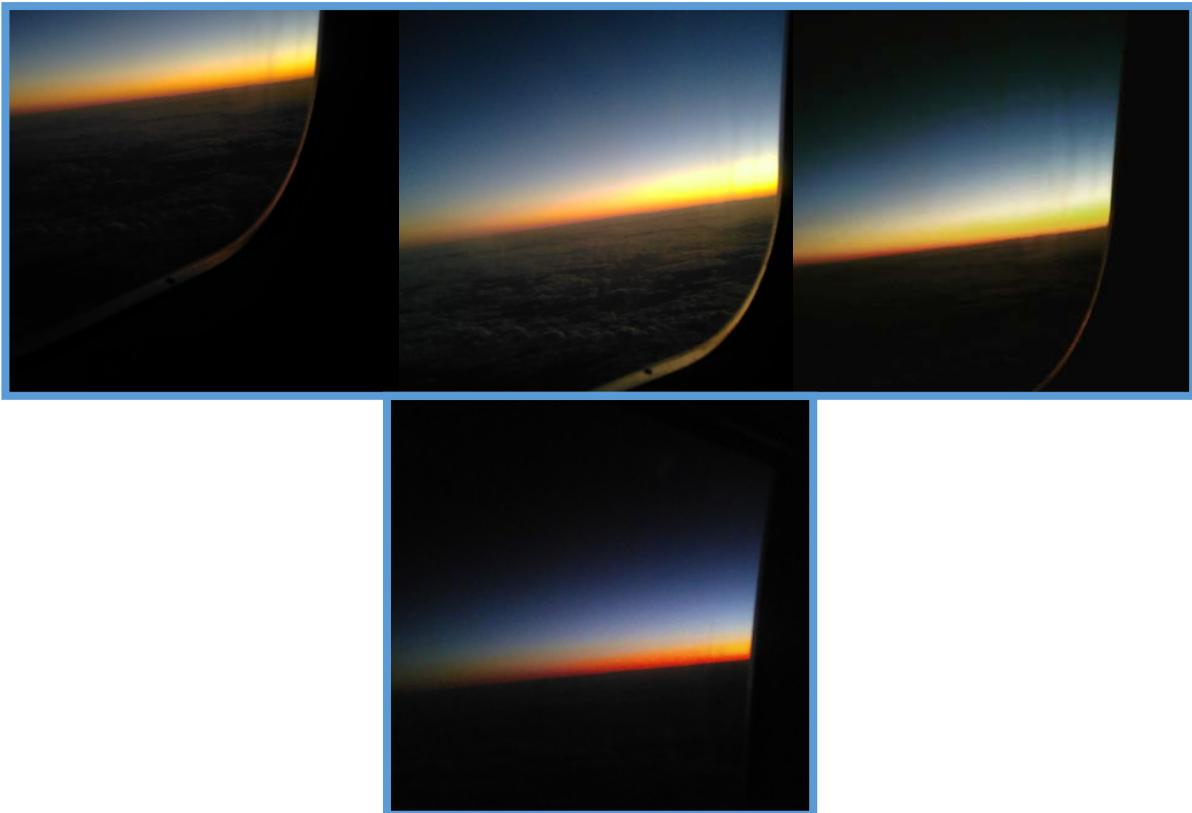


Dropped us at the airport and said bye, rather sad. Cleared check in, bag had bug spray in it I forgot about. Took a little while to get through. Then had my name on the tanoy. Quite scary, especially in an airport. Asked a security guard and then went to one of the desks, somebody had left their phone and they thought it was me, luckily not.

Wasted a bit of time in Starbucks, really wanted one of the Hawaii flasks but the patterns weren't quite right to get me to spend my last few dollars. Boarding and off we go.

Made it to San Francisco in one piece. Still have mixed feelings about going home, obviously leaving such an amazing place but glad to be going back to the family.

Found a really good pizza place so that was lunch. The airport was a lot bigger than expected as well. Flight from San Francisco, got an aisle seat then swapped with a family that wanted to sit together. Good dead for the day done. Honestly can't believe it's over. A really nice way to spend the last day thought, just wish we had more spare money to buy nice presents for people, when I'm a millionaire.



Starting to think about getting home. So much work, to do to get back into the swing of it. Need to give Gentle a draft of my data analysis report, that means doing it first. Want to start all my crop trials and business ideas sooner rather than later as well. Just go with the flow to start with I guess.

‘Travel to learn, return to inspire’

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WITH THANKS

This report was dedicated to the important people that made it achievable but it should be stated again.

Huge thanks must go out to Rowena Wilson of the RHS, Chloe Wells of the Merlin Trust and Annamay Simpson of Nottingham Trent University. These ladies showed great patience bombarded with endless questions and were all extremely kind, they are all credits to their organisations.

Thank you for reading and I hope that has inspired you to take opportunities and make the most of the beautiful around the world.

Kind regards,

Connor Deacon