



## Land, God, soul

"Retreat" can mean many things. A beautiful comfortable space away from the hustle and bustle? A chance to relax and have some time for yourself? Running away from everyday life? Fleeing the field of battle?

Gembrook Retreat is beautiful, but it is also wild and alive. The land is breathing and crawling and surging and crying out. It is not static or simple.

Gembrook Retreat can be a relaxing place of solitude and refreshment. But it is also challenging and confronting, because we bring ourselves and all our inner turmoils and problems with us. Plus we have to climb hills, wrestle with fire, face the dark and brave the spiders.

We know that the world can be a place of battle and struggle for many, and those battles come in many forms. Gembrook Retreat offers a place to step out for a while, to see clearly, to remember what we care about and why it is important enough to keep struggling. Or whether we are in danger of losing our souls in the fight.

**At Gembrook Retreat we invite people on to the land to encounter God in creation, and to equip each other to live a soulful life.**

We continue to hold this space through the fallow season of Covid-19.

### Land



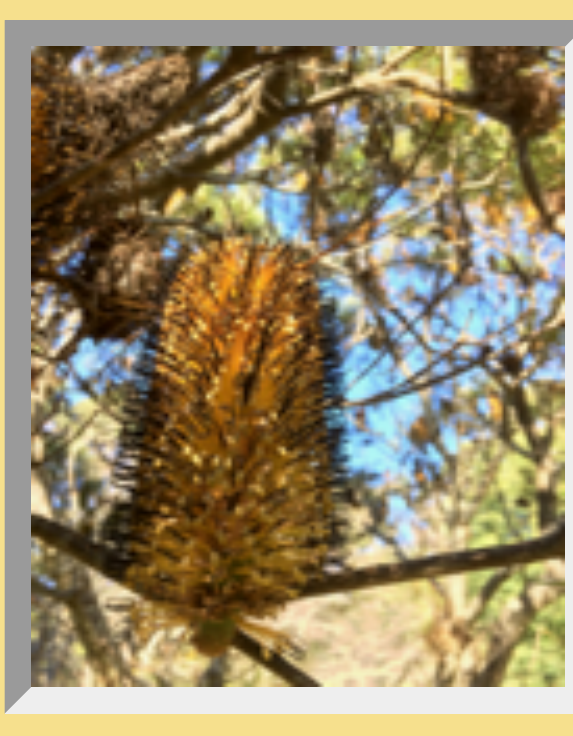
We have set up a bird feeding station outside the window on our new deck, and Sally is recording the birds that come in to visit. We even found some of the names in Wolwurrung.

So far we have seen uu-gup (king parrot, pictured left) damun (crimson rosella), gaan (sulphur crested white cockatoo), galah, bowerbird, bronze-wing pigeon, corella, butcherbird and yan-guk (wattlebird).

The proteas are coming into season. We have only a few bushes that currently produce long stem flowers, but several others have shorter stems that are still ok for cutting. Even with fewer passersby, we make some sales from the buckets at the top of our driveway. We are looking forward to when our FRoGR volunteers can come and help with cutting back the blackberry that is starting to slash at the fingers of unwary protea harvesters!



The daffodils, wattle and other spring flowers are also well into bloom, reminding us that this is Guling (orchid season).



### God

#### Spirituality of the Early Quakers

Jane, Steve, Miri and Samara have been participating in an online course about the Spirituality of the Early Quakers, run by the Woodbrooke Quaker Centre in Birmingham UK.

The first Quakers in England in the 1600s found it to be true that the Spirit of God was present and available to everyone no matter their class status, gender or even religion. Therefore their social action was radical and confronting in their society. They refused to give special deference to those who were considered at the time to be of high status, and they withdrew support from religious institutions and practices that seemed to get in the way of people's direct and equal access to God. Women prophesied and preached, and Quakers made connections with Muslims and Jewish people when the surrounding culture was hostile to other religions.

The original Quakers were named because they tended to quake with fervour when they were speaking from the influence of the Spirit. They were also a persecuted group, so they went through a stage of having to work out how to continue to exist while maintaining the integrity of their testimony.

As we consider how this Quaker heritage can influence our community here at Gembrook and what we can offer our guests, it's a good time to keep learning and reflecting on what the Spirit of God is asking of us in this time and place.

#### Sit spot

You may have heard of the concept of a 'sit spot'. At the Common Grace Climate Pastoral Care conference, Sarah van Earp talked about developing a sit spot practice:



"Do you have a place you like to go in nature? Somewhere you can recharge and connect with the natural world? Somewhere you can take your deepest self, your joy, your grief, your peace? Could such a place offer you a mirror to your soul, a mentor to your deepest yearnings? Do you make time in your life to hear what nature has to show and tell you?"

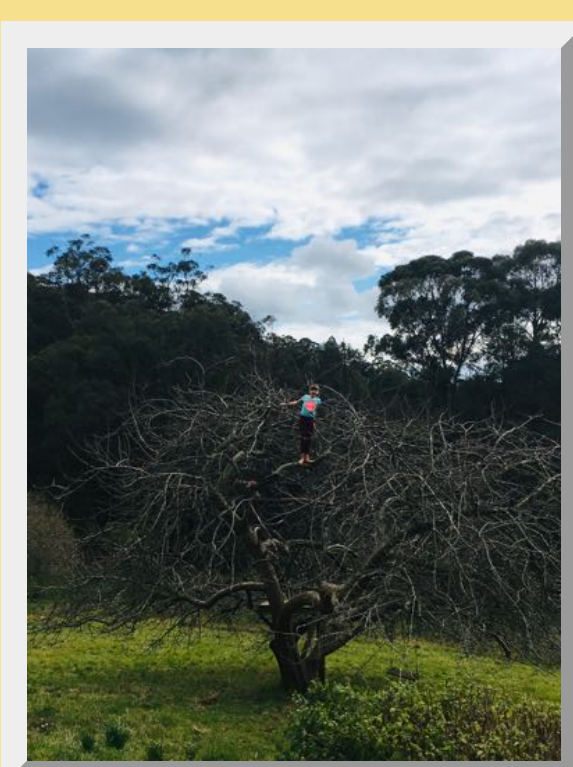
People who went to the workshop had lots of questions (eg. Can I bring coffee??) Even though the idea of finding a place in nature and just sitting there for an hour seems straightforward, many of us can still find it unfamiliar and a bit daunting. We feel that

helping people have a go at spending time in a sit spot at Gembrook Retreat might help them to experiment and overcome the initial difficulties so that it can become a regular practice.

### Soul

Our community here has shifted around as the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have intensified. Samara has moved in to Blue Tongue House permanently, finishing up 13 years at the Indigenous Hospitality House in the city. Cameron moved out in August, having been often spending his weeks between three different households - not a viable option in these times!

The Hope family and Samara continue to work on ways to live a soulful life where we are. We have watched the films 'Plastic Ocean', which looks at the impacts of plastic waste and 'Dominion', which shows the cruelty of industrial meat industries in Australia. We have discovered that to eat without plastic packaging, we need to be very organised! We have had to work out how to get bulk supplies of dry goods when we can only shop in a 5km radius - big shout out to the Unwrapped Pantry which is going the extra mile to deliver to us. Sometimes it means making a costly change - Sally has experimented with going without 2 minute noodles, a former lunch staple which is often only found at our local shop in highly packaged single serves. We start asking questions, like why does soy milk only come in 1L cartons? And why do I always remember my keep cup for takeaway coffee but forget to bring a container for them to pop a cinnamon donut into??



For keeping our spirits up, we are singing together! After several weeks of working our way through 'Walking on sunshine', 'Here comes the sun' and 'I can see clearly now the rain has gone', we feel personally responsible for the advent of a few days of warmer weather. We have also been putting some excerpts from Quaker Advices and Queries to music, and learning a couple of songs in Yorta Yorta and Noongar languages.

Sally introduced us to the Paul Kelly song 'Sleep Australia sleep' which reminds us to stay awake to the threats to this country's unique birds, animals and fish life.

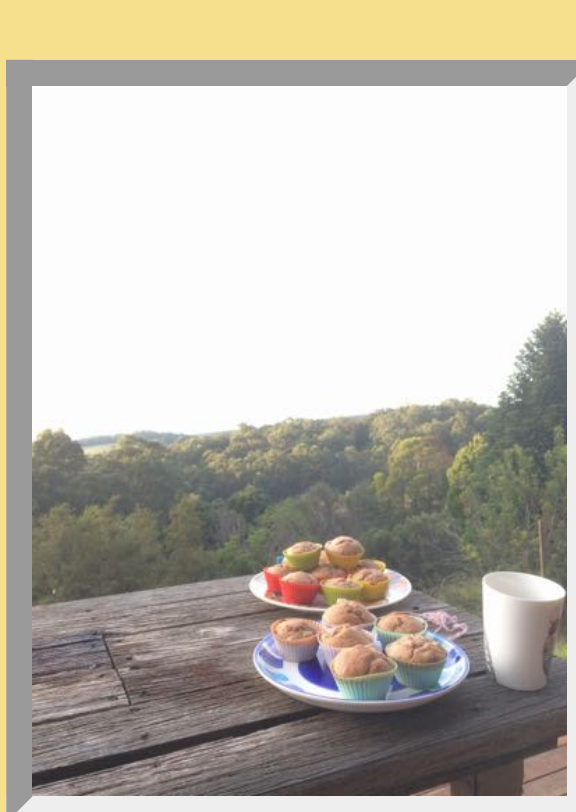
Samara introduced everyone to 'Humble yourself in the arms of the wild' which Sally then sang as she climbed the apple tree.

And finally when it all really gets to us, we have resorted to murdering family and friends... in our version of the board game Cluedo. In 'Pseudo', it's possible that Crooked Cam might kill someone in the Laundry with the Vacuum Cleaner. (See Cam, this is what happens when you move out...)



### FRoGR news

Our Friends of Gembrook Retreat (FRoGR) working bees are reduced to residents only. However, Jane now has a greenhouse in the veggie patch, and 3 new avocados to plant. We have made good use of the harvest of pumpkin, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage, and are grateful for the citrus that keeps away winter sniffles, and helps avoid unnecessary trips to get Covid tested!



### Donate

While we are not able to host at the moment, landcare and building work goes on. Most of our income comes from resident rent, guest accommodation, donations and some sales of produce and flowers. This is usually enough to cover our running costs but not to build extra overnight accommodation, or do bigger maintenance jobs on the land and current buildings, and it relies on the residents volunteering their time to run the retreat.

If you would like to donate to Gembrook Retreat or support a particular project, we would really appreciate it. You could also become a member of FRoGR (Friends of Gembrook Retreat) and stay in touch with working bee information. The annual membership fee is \$10 unwaged, \$25 waged.

You can find our bank details below. (Please email us so we can receipt your donation - note that donations are not tax deductible.)

Gembrook Retreat Inc.  
bsb: 633-000  
Acc #: 126423615  
tag: donation



Gembrook Retreat  
215 Beenak East Rd, Gembrook, 3783  
T: (03) 5968 1211  
E: [info@gembrookretreat.org.au](mailto:info@gembrookretreat.org.au)  
W: [www.gembrookretreat.org.au](http://www.gembrookretreat.org.au)



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