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As Witches Falls – Queensland's oldest National Park – turns 100, *Great Walks* gets caught under its spell.....

Witches Falls cackles like an old crone, a Kookaburra laughs outrageously and the wompoo dove shouts “woop woop” from somewhere deep in the rainforest.

And they have good reason to celebrate.

Queensland's oldest national park, Witches Falls on the Gold Coast Hinterland, turned 100 in March.

First gazetted on March 28, 1908, Witches Falls now lies within Tamborine National Park and is believed to be the third oldest in the world after Yellowstone National Park in the US and Sydney's Royal National Park.

Forget Surfers Paradise in the distance below. This is a walkers paradise formed some 23 million years ago when the landscape was coated in rich volcanic earth. Among a myriad of creatures, the rare Albert's lyrebird and one of the world's largest skinks – the land mullet – call Witches Falls home.

In the Witches Falls Section – so named by superstitious locals who believed the Wicca (a black magic cloth) once inhabited the area and to this day some walkers feel they're being watched – a trek down to the waterfall is a bit like diving deep into a cauldron itself.

The 3.1km walk is one of the signature strolls in the area, where red berries litter the forest floor like confetti, and the seasonal lagoon sits as stagnant as a broth.

For a different perspective, hikers prepared to enter the National Park at night, particularly around Curtis Falls, may bump into Tamborine Mountain Landcare President Jaap Vogel, who is a walking encyclopedia of knowledge on the area.

So passionate is he about this patch of paradise, Jaap will take the time to point out glowworms embedded along the trail, eels which have migrated from Vanuatu, trapdoor and giant water spiders, leaf tail geckos and brush-tail possums among the park's magical creatures.

While Jaap loves the park at any time, it is after dark when he believes walkers can appreciate its true beauty. “I feel safer in this forest at night than I do in the city,” he says. “It is so peaceful. When I ask people what they enjoy at night they say it is the atmosphere.”

During the day, Curtis Falls gushes like a Sydney socialite and water dragons sunbathe like Los Angeles lusher on giant rocks which line the creek bed.

Walkers are well rewarded as this track winds around the crystal clear creek flanked by fig trees caught in a passionate embrace with other stranglers. At night, the glowworms sparkle like precious diamonds and eels sashay through the stream.

“Early in the morning when you take a walk and you hear the lyre birds, it is just terrific,” Jaap says. “I never get tired of it. It really feels like a privilege to be here.”

Danielle Lancaster co-founder of Bluedog Photography which runs regular photographic retreats and workshops on the mountain says every time she enters the park she discovers something new.

“Silence is a big thing. I will tell photography groups to just listen . You listen after people have been walking and the forest becomes quiet and about five minutes later the forest comes alive again,” she says.

“The best shot of the rainforest is just after the rain. I've come out saturated. On overcast days the light is all diffused, everything is clean and fresh, and water always brings out the colour in everything.”

“It is up to us to decide where the camera looks. Get down on the ground, look at things from a different angle. I always say I'm going to shoot something till it's dead.”

For a sensational sunset, try The Knoll section of the Sandy Creek Circuit – a walk with steep edges, but the rewards are great, as this track too winds around the creek. At the end of the walk, and facing west towards Brisbane, lies the Cameron Falls lookout.

Another vantage point from which to salute the setting sun is from the Rotary Lookout, near the start of the Witches Falls Circuit, where the Canungra Valley sits below, swathed in an emerald green blanket after recent rain.

David Kennedy and Daniela Kuratli, owners of the Hansel and Gretel-style **Witches Falls Cottages**, believe Tamborine Mountain's magic lies in the fact that it's an hour away from Brisbane and about half an hour from the Gold Coast but a world away from reality.

“It is only about 550 odd metres high but it generally is about five or six degrees cooler. For people to be able to escape their daily life into a different world even just for a few days is what it is all about for us,” David says.

“What's important when you come to Tamborine Mountain is there are enough things to do around here but you can also do none of them. The important thing is you don't feel guilty if you don't do any of it.”

Except hike of course. Some of the walks are *wicked*.