

## ACCOMMODATION

# IN THE VALLEY of possums

Just a two-hour drive from Cairns, BRIDGET MARTIN finds a cottage with possums, platypuses, pademelons and peace, on tap.

A platypus is playing in the water, within 10 metres of the veranda. It surfaces and quickly dives, a trail of bubbles marking its progress as it fossicks for food under the water.

We are spending a blissfully peaceful weekend in a rainforest cottage at Possum Valley, on the southern Cairns Highlands. Two hours by car from Cairns, Possum Valley is a 63ha privately-owned property, perched at a refreshing 1100m above sea level.

Paul Tredgett bought the property with a friend 30 years ago. They each built a cottage for themselves but when Paul married and had a family, he built a larger home. The three-bedroom cottages are now rented out, on a self-catering basis, at very reasonable rates.

Both cottages retain a homely, lived-in charm quite different to the built-for-tourists feel of more upmarket resorts. Sleeping six to eight, they are ideal for families but can equally well suit a couple, seeking peace and quiet, or a group of friends. Black Bean Cottage sits right next to one of the three dams on the property. Here, platypuses can be seen and the dam is also home to a very large eel.

Maple Cottage is a five-minute walk up the hill. A back veranda overlooks a steep grassy slope which leads down to another dam, where a yellow rowing boat awaits the pleasure of guests.

In the evening, red-legged pademelons

— small rainforest-dwelling wallabies — come out to graze on the grass.

And of course there are possums. As dusk falls a furry figure eases itself over the edge of the roof and climbs down to the veranda railing. It is a coppery brushtail, found only in the rainforests of the Cairns Highlands. As two more appear, it balances on the railing, sniffing the air and looking as if it might leap at any moment on to my lap. Personally I prefer my wildlife a little more wild, but these confident possums are accustomed to being fed.

Possums are not the only intruders. In the bathroom there are very small frogs with enormously long legs and each morning a Lewin's honeyeater flies into the cottage to pick crumbs from the floor.

The birds around Possum Valley are another treat. We see huge numbers of satin bowerbirds and an aptly-named superb fruit-dove is gulping fruit from a nearby tree. Crimson rosellas feed on the ground outside the cottage and firetail finches, with scarlet bandit-masks and rumps, pick through the grass for seeds.

The rainforest is crisscrossed with a network of flagged trails, numbers on trees corresponding to a botanical guide, supplied in the cottage. One short walk leads past a mini-hydro system, which supplies power to the property, to a meditation hut. This small wooden shelter perched over Possum Creek has a zen-like view of a small waterfall.



**Rainforest cottage:** Located in Possum Valley, wildlife love to pop in.

Another track leads to a sauna, a purpose-built wooden structure overlooking the third dam. Fuel is supplied, but guests must light the fire and heat the sauna themselves, a process which takes two or three hours. We are too lazy and, instead, sit by the dam watching another platypus and a startled water dragon.

A games room is positioned in a clearing between the cottages. Apart from a washing machine and a gallery displaying Paul's woodwork, it has a pool table, table tennis and table football as well as a black-and-white

television; the cottages are tele-free zones.

There is plenty to keep the visitor busy in Possum Valley, but it also makes an ideal base for exploring the southern Highlands. Mt Hypipamee, with its unique crater, is just down the road and there are waterfalls at Millaa Millaa and Millstream. Herberton, a historic tin-mining town is close by as is the lovely town of Ravenshoe, with its excellent visitor centre and gateway to the Misty Mountains walking network. Most of Paul's custom comes from repeat customers — and with good reason.



**A cutie:** This possum wandered into the cottage for a hello, and a bite to eat.

## fact file

**Where:** Possum Valley is about 110km from Cairns, between Atherton and Ravenshoe. The signposted turnoff is on the Kennedy Highway, at the Tumoulin junction. A 4.5km unsealed road leads into the property. It is alright for conventional vehicles but the final steep hill into the property can, in wet weather, make leaving difficult.

**Cost:** Each cottage is \$75 for a couple, per night, with \$5 for an extra adult and \$2.50 per child. Cheaper rates are available for long-term stays.

**Facilities:** Each cottage has two double bedrooms and one with two single beds. Access to the attic bedroom in Black Bean is for the relatively agile. Linen and towels supplied. Fridge, gas stove and kitchen equipment are supplied. There are gas heaters.

Contact Paul Tredgett, **ph/fax:** (07) 4097 8177; **e-mail:** possumvalley@iig.com.au; **web:** www.bnbq.com.au/possumvalley



**Comfy:** Country charm is what Black Bean Cottage is all about.