

Le Conte de la Côte d'Azur

By John Wrench, Member of the Queensland Bushfood Association
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Abstract An account of a teaching trip to Nice, France, by three Australians in October 2004 in order to introduce the use of indigenous bushfood materials at Le Lycée Paul Augier (School of Hospitality). In addition, some other significant events which occurred before, during and after the teaching are described, including a grand bushfood banquet, as well as some important outcomes relating to the further export of bushfoods to France.

Introduction It all began with a phone call from a stranger in need, in the previous year 2003 in August. Daniel Abad is the director of Hanson Enterprises in Toowoomba, a firm engaged in the organisation of cultural exchange matters, including visits and exchanges as well as training courses. The appeal for help came as a result of a request from an associated firm in Nice for assistance in exhibiting materials and images of Australian native plants for a science expo (*Les Plantes et Les Hommes*) held in Nice through October. Daniel and his colleagues visited me briefly at home to explain their needs, as a result of which I subsequently loaned them ninety-five 35mm slides, later returned. In addition, Geoff Maudsley, a local environmentalist, filmed a video, in which I described in French four bushland zones which we visited including the Chermside Hills. The point of this detail is that this activity generated considerable goodwill in Nice which bore fruit a year later.

Objectives of the Visit to Nice

1. In general, to demonstrate to the staff and students of the School of Hospitality and certain others the use of a range of indigenous bushfood items.
2. Specifically, to produce a prestigious luncheon banquet with the assistance of college staff and senior students in the banquet hall of the college.
3. Specifically, to conduct workshops to demonstrate the use of a wide range of bushfood items, many of which were not used in the banquet.
4. Of secondary importance, to investigate and promote the possibility of establishing export markets for bushfood items and products in France.

Preparatory activities

1. It was essential to clarify the strategies to be employed in freighting to Nice the materials for the various activities planned, in conformity with the relevant regulations.
2. Coordination of the transport of items from the several suppliers. Some items required refrigeration to arrive at the appropriate temperature for reception and storage at the college.
3. A trial banquet at Ricky Ricardo's restaurant in Noosa using the menu planned for Nice.

Detail

1. Language problems certainly interfered with the planned programmes but were mitigated by
 - 1.1 reasonable facility with English by some of the staff and students and
 - 1.2 the remarkable ability of Dale Chapman Scott to communicate without the specific use of the French language.

2 The banquet

In my opinion, the trial banquet at Noosa was a superior meal, but the luncheon in Nice was a great success. The guests included many distinguished chefs, food industry officials and community leaders. It was obvious that effective networking was taking place both during the meal and afterwards.

There were speeches, during which Daniel Abad introduced his two colleagues and launched his plans for future activities.

It is worth referring to the brilliant displays of Australian indigenous art in the gallery surrounding the banquet hall and in other areas. I understand that some paintings were sold.

Other meals

The college operates restaurants open to the paying public at several floor levels corresponding to the level of training of the students.

Dale organised several other meals at the top level during the visit.

3 Workshops

The workshops produced by John Wrench tended to be compromised by the restriction of student assistance and the needs of Daniel Abad to use every public interaction to promote the proposed trading activities.

In any case, every exposure of the various materials produced positive responses, not to say astonishment, whether in workshops or in interaction with the staff and students.

No materials were brought back to Australia – some left at the college for experiment, some with chefs and some for private use – all received enthusiastically.

4 Promotion

The period after the banquet was used by Daniel and Dale for an intense programme of interviews and investigations designed to initiate trade in bushfoods with chefs and others in the fine food industry in southeast France.

In fact, the leading chef in the zone placed an order for riberry on the day of the banquet.

5 Presents from Australia

The goods freighted to Nice included not only essential ingredients but also promotional gifts of two kinds:

- 5.1 table gifts for the banquet and

- 5.2 Australian wildlife photographs taken by John Wrench.

These consisted of large framed prints as significant gifts of appreciation to the Director and senior staff of the college and others. Lesser (framed or laminated) prints for other expressions of gratitude were given and postcard prints (mounted and signed) for more general distribution.

All of the photographs drew warm appreciation and praise at every level, adding to the generation of goodwill

associated with the visit and to interest in the Australian native environment

6 French language

I experienced both good and bad episodes in speaking the local language. Problems arose under pressure, especially when departing from a restricted range of subjects, also when tired or suffering from low blood sugar levels and with somewhat strange local accents, very common in Nice. It was certainly challenging and stimulating at every stage.

7 The College (Lycée Paul Augier)

The word *Lycée* actually refers to a secondary college in most cases but this college does not correspond to any education mode in Australia. Many tertiary institutions in Australia, such as universities, offer degree courses in hospitality. In the case of TAFE colleges, certificate courses and diplomas are available with various emphases. Apprenticeships with block training in various institutions are also available.

In Nice, this college is best understood by examining a photograph of the five-storey twin towers which demonstrate the two thrusts of the training. The block facing the sea and the airport to the south contains the administration offices and the reception at the ground level, the stores and cold rooms below ground level and the various kitchens and restaurants at the ascending levels above.

From the fifth floor restaurant which, on occasions, serves as the banquet room with galleries above, the view of the airport and, beyond it the Mediterranean, is very impressive.

The parallel block to the north contains the normal secondary school units and student facilities. Linking the two towers, in an architecture design suggestive of two ship decks, is a series of outdoor floors and gardens providing recreation areas.

8 Haute cuisine – Restaurant and private

The opportunities to experience high-level French cooking fell into two categories – those provided by the college restaurants (8.1 below) and others, including both commercial restaurants and private dinners (8.2).

8.1 A number of college lunches occurred at both fifth and fourth floor levels. The farewell meal, presented by the Director on the fifth floor, was one during which presents were exchanged. On every occasion, the food quality was exquisite and the service by the students, exemplary. The opportunity to taste a wide variety of regional wines was a special feature of the visit. By some chance, the notion was aired that John Wrench possessed some skills in wine appreciation, resulting in excruciating challenges whenever a bottle was opened, both at the college and on every other occasion. Suffice it to say that, despite some humiliating failures, such as the inability to identify a Corsican Carrignan, a legendary reputation now lingers on in the reports of this visit.

8.2 Without going into detail, these meals included a lunch at the leading seafood restaurant on the beach near the river mouth, a dinner at a small Spanish suburban restaurant, a home-cooked Sunday lunch at the home of one of the college administrators in a hill village, a dinner at the elegant apartment of the couple who visited Australia in 2004, a wonderful lunch with Dale in a courtyard in Grasse and numerous family breakfasts and evening

meals with Daniel's parents, brother and sister's family (on occasions).

8.3 Shopping experiences could run to a thousand words or more, so is best left for conversations.

8.4 Similarly, the accounts of lengthy exploration on foot, the old town, the experience on Castle Rock, the artist at Cimiez, the bay tree and so on, are best recounted over a meal with a bottle or two.

8.5 It was possible to visit the very old hill town of Grasse, the perfume centre in the Alpes Maritimes. Dale and I spent a precious six hours or so on a bus visit to this intriguing town with its snaking, steep, cobbled streets and beguiling shops. Needless to say, we blew our budgets at the perfume factory.

9 Post-visit outcomes.

The promotional exertions of Dale and Daniel were directed at establishing bushfood trading into France by the medium of Dale's enterprise *Dillybag*.

9.1 As a secondary element in this project, the eventual development of bushfood production for export by the Purga community (south of Ipswich) is the subject of current planning.

10 Summary.

The promotional trip to Nice can be said without reserve to have succeeded in its aims to reveal the riches of the Australian bushfood to the influential Lycée Paul Augier and to the fine food professionals in the southeast of France.

10.1 The effect does not end with that event but will be succeeded by other visits and activities already under discussion.

10.2 Benefits to the Australian bushfood industry are certain to follow the energetic pursuit of these promising leads in the foreseeable future.

11

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