

..... Exploring The Hiddenness Of Life

... In the Mulch and Earth of Life ...

**...The Story of Ken Aitken's
Growing up in Northern New South Wales in the
1950's and 1960's and
Brisbane in the 1970's to 2006**

Ken's Memories and Impressions

**Chapter 4:
House across the creek:
1956 - 2006**

The House in January 2006 Fifty Years on.



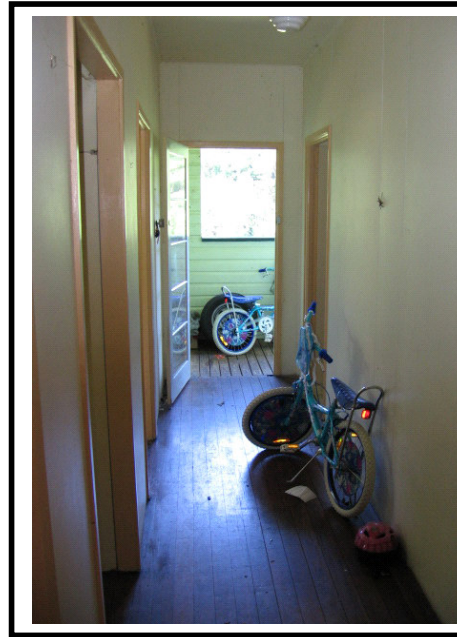
**The House is rented out by David
Dubens the new owner**



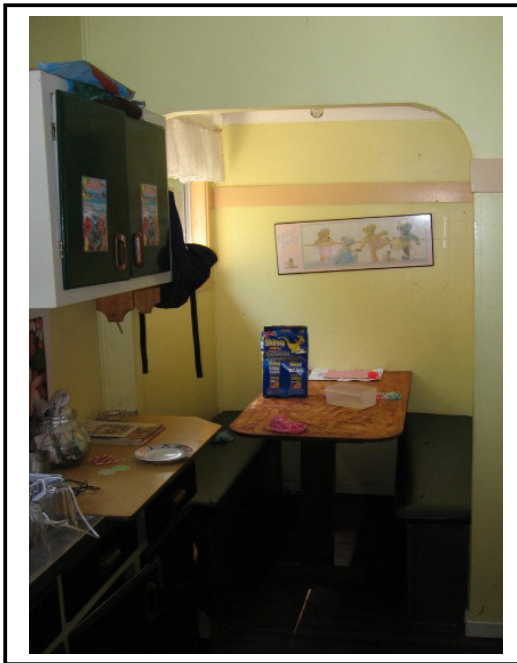
The Kitchen Area



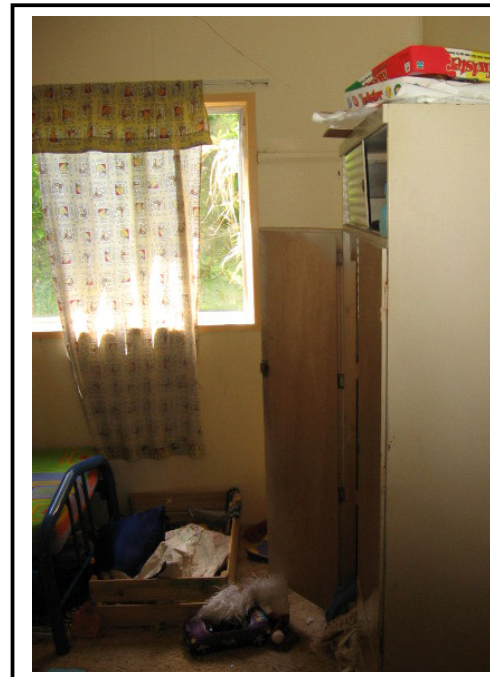
**Mixed Vegetable Garden
being Grown by the People
Renting the House**



The Hall



The Alcove Eating Area



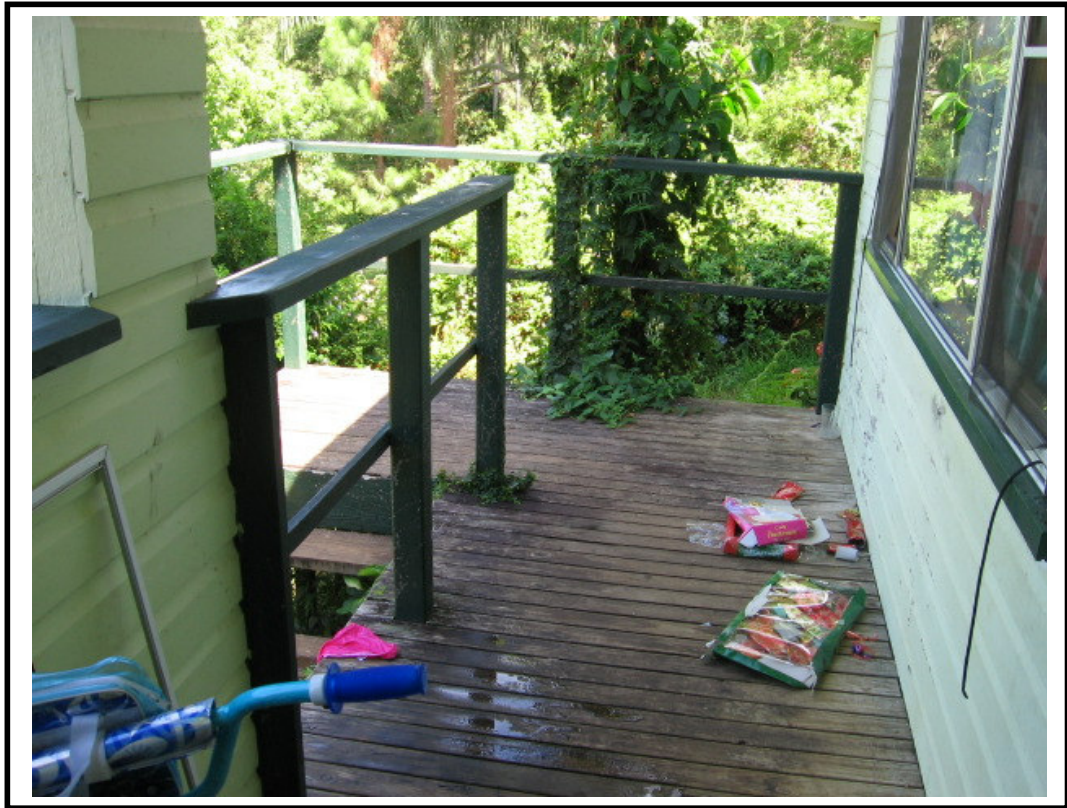
Bedroom No. 1



Master Bedroom



**Bedroom No. 2: Ken's Old
Bedroom**



The porch outside has been built. House with steps to the ground was just an unfinished area in 1995 when the property was sold



The Lounge Room of the House

Natural geographical features of the locality

- **One of the main features of the site was the creek** it was a series of large pools up to fifty metres across, rapids and boulders edged by glass clear waters with darker shadows streaked with lighter translucent sun shafts falling through the edging trees in lighter colours. Water from the top rapids flowed into the first main pool which was our swimming pool which then flowed over tan-coloured rock shelves to flow into a deeper dark green pool below which was a much longer pool.

In these pools we went fishing and swimming as kids see diagram and photographs below.

- **Left hand side of the creek:** Was where we entered the water the bank sloped down to soft tan – brown river gravel then into shallow water this was where the creek flowed slowly around the outside southern edge of the pool ... sand and gravel partly covered by organic matter fallen leaves are 200 – 300 mm deep ... water is 500 mm deep here whenever you walk here, it releases clouds of gas bubbles one day in the early 1960's with my chemistry set and books, I leant this was marsh gas or methane gas which was being released from the decomposing leaves The gas was trapped in the gravel and mud and was released when the surface of the gravel was broken.

I caught some of this gas in an inverted waterfilled glass jar where the bubbles arose and displaced the water I put a lid on the jar and took it back to my chemistry set I lit the gas and it burned with a slow blue flame like methylated spirits so I knew it methane being released from the decomposing leaves.

- **Floods and cyclones:** which came nearly every year in the 1950's, 1960's and early 1970's swirling air would form into a low pressure system over a whole region and would initially gather up in the Coral Sea up north forming into a rain depression or cyclone which would rotate clockwise to pass moisture laden air onto the coast from off the sea then it moved progressively down the coast to cross our section of the coast in the eye of the cyclone This meant the eye of the cyclone was only moving dry air off the land into itself which swirled around to become moisture laden air directed onto the coast from off the sea then the eye had crossed over that was the end of the cyclone.

When I was home in the 1950's and the 1960's I remember some of these things:

- How the rain and wind lashed around the eaves
- How I often played dams and paddle wheels made out of empty wooden cotton reels in the grass drain which cut across the hill behind the shed
- The tossing waves of the swollen creek
- The flying fox over the creek at the engine room to get to Mullumbimby High School (1961 - 1967)
- Dad put in two stout posts on either side of the creek with a double banana wire between them the whole family would jump on separate pulleys and pull ourselves across to the other side Each pulley had a short rope and thick stick between your legs ... I remember my feet barely a metre off the tossing brown water as I pulled myself over on the pulley,..... I walked with my two of my brothers up to Wilsons Creek Rd. to catch the High School bus into Mullumbimby then doing the same in the afternoon after school.

When a cyclone was coming down the coast and creek had come up, the flying fox enabled us



The Creek in Full Flood After Cyclone

freedom of movement in a cyclone Dad would drive the vehicle across to the other side of the creek and leave it there We could always go as a family into town or church when the weather was bad and creek was up.

We would hear on the radio the progression of the cyclone down the coast and when it was expected to cross our section of coast. The creek would be transformed overnight into a huge tossing and surging sea of muddy water filling the whole creek to a depth of ten to twenty metres the rain just

poured down day after day till the eye of the cyclone passed on and out to sea.

When the rain had stopped, we would troop as a family down the creek to see how high the creek came up in the middle of the night as invariably the eye of the cyclone had passed over in the middle of the night it could come up around ten to twenty metres in height. We would then often go down the engine room to see if the flood waters had come up anywhere near the engine room at the crossing It had been very high if had come up to there.

Description of the creek: our section of the creek consisted alternating variations in the creek:

- The top pool which was our swimming hole as it had a gravelly sloping bottom going over to a two metre deep rocky bottom with a 250 mm underwater rock shelf we could all swim to. The pool was about 30 metres across by 75 metres long
- Then a narrow constricted passage which glided over a 300 mm deep rock shelf top flow into a lower large pool ... about 75 metres across by 200 metres long
- Then there was a series of large bouldery rapids for another 200 metres
- Then there was Pool 3= Lower Pool. It was about 50 metres across by 75 metres long we rarely swam in here as there was not a good entry to the pool plus it was an uneven depth that was green and mysterious. I only fished here as it was good for catfish.
- Then there was a series of large bouldery rapids again for another 200 metres down the concrete creek crossing which Dad built in the early 1960's

For me I was constantly exploring right down and above our section of creek. Virtually every tree grove, pool and boulder has some memory for me. I was out at the old property meeting the new people in 2001 and 2006 as the farm had been sold in 1995. See the descriptions and photographs below.



Pool 1: The top pool ran from a sloping gravelly bottom on the left hand side of the creek and sloped over to a 1.50 metre high rocky boulder wall. This then fell a further two metres to a rocky bottom below. A 250 mm deep underwater rock shelf projected out from this wall. The photograph above shows the surrounding rainforest trees.



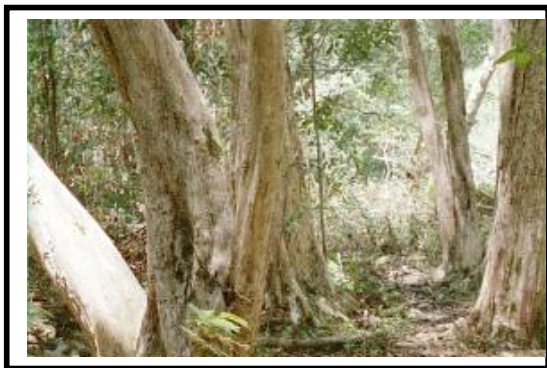
Pool 1: Photograph above shows the 1.50 metre high rocky boulder wall on the far side of the pool. This wall sloped down two metres to a rocky bottom with a 250 mm underwater rock shelf we swam to.



The series of large bouldery rapids from Pool 3 for 200 metres down the concrete creek crossing which Dad built in the early 1960's

Verbal Description A Journaling Experience of Pool 1:

..... I am sitting between the upper and lower pools The upper pool is a still pool with slight ripples on the surface from the incoming water from the rapids on the topside of the pool ... there are shadowed shades of water dark green with streaked patches of lighter light-lit water tiny white froth flecks moving gently down on the smooth water surface the pool is edged with tall trees 50 metres or so high some of them are water gums as in the photographs below.



.... There are various assorted rainforest trees with small subdivided dark leaves in loose clumps on the edge of stretching thin branches trees overhang the pool now in past years it was more open and sunny A Bangalow Palm to 3.00 metres high grows upwards as dark green graceful palm fronds from beyond the boulder

On the right hand side is a bouldery slope of small boulders 200 – 300 mm in diameter the boulders are mainly 100 mm in size and traverse down the slope some of the boulders are covered in pads of moist green moss exposed 100 mm tree roots mingle with the boulders a large 600 mm rainforest tree butt ends the sloped shoulder.

Through the creek bush comes repeated bird sounds (currawongs) the sounds cascade down among the forest trees bird sounds, the gentle sounds of moving water and the soft sounds of moving leaves in the occasional breeze interweave together through the rich greenness.

The upper end of the pool is backed by a watergum forest in trim 100 - 200 mm cream – fawn smooth trunks Often in multiples of two or three trunks arising next to each other occasional trunks marked out in smooth cream bark but other trunks in darker bark lomandra sedges in dark green blades Tussocky at the base near the waters edge soft filtered light alights on the dark green leaves alternatively with dark then light green leaves.





Upper end of Pool 1 is edged with bush boulders and sedgy lomandra grass. Water gum trunks ascend in an open forest behind the water ...see photograph above.

Personal Experiences of the locality

Flying Fox Wire across Pool 1 as well ... was for getting to the house if the creek was in flood one day Dad and Gerald coming down a pulley and just missing the floodwaters. The other flying fox wire was right down the creek further at the crossing and engine room area of the creek.



Helene Aitken (nee Jenkins) before she married Gerald Aitken, my brother in 1973. going over on the wire in a flooded creek time at the swimming pool

- **Swimming in the creek:** as a family at the end of hot summer days we used to leave our wet clothes to dry on the clumps of reeds swimming with my brothers in our later years in Pool 1.

- **Family Outings:**

Day Trips to Byron Bay to see the whale catching Seeing the long Byron jetty way out into the ocean when the whale catchers came in the slip - way up which they snigged the whales the tram that they were then loaded onto the whaling station sharp flensing knives on wooden handles being wielded cutting a huge side off the whale like a huge fish fillet as they snigged with a wire rope and hook the side up to the slipway to be boiled down

Pipping with Dad and us boys in the sand and water near the edge of the jettytwisting our feet in the sand for the feel of the pippies Hundreds of pippies for the chooks Also earlier than this time, going to Byron Bay up from the jetty Schools of mullet coming in the commercial fisherman rowing with their nets and pulling them up on the beach ... we were helping them to get them out of the nets Going to the fish co-op up from the jetty and buying a few ... Dad filleting them and throwing the backbones down the back behind our two room packing shed ... I remember looking at the bare backbones the next morning.

Camping At Brunswick Heads: We would often camp at Brunswick at Massey Green Caravan Park in a tent in the Christmas holidays in the 1960's. In the early 1960's there were just bare sandbanks along the entire river to the estuary bar leading to the open ocean. The trawler Fleet would be moored at a series of wooden posts with a wooden ramps. When the tide came in, the ramps would be cut off by deep water behind the ramps. Groups of teenagers would fish with handlines off the ramps and off the backs of the trawlers. You catch bream, whiting and the occasional flathead.

I remember fishing with handlines with Dad along the sandbars going out towards the bar. In the early 1960's that all changed. The local council began to build basalt boulder walls all along the river from a purpose built trawler

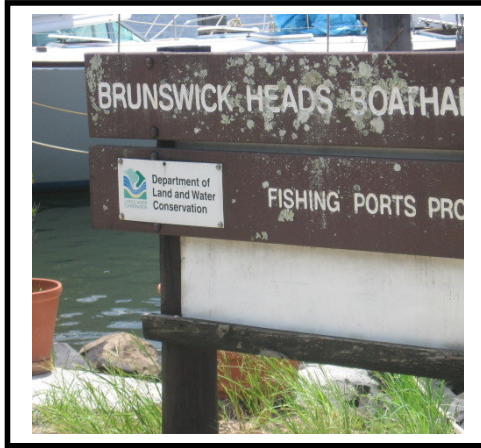
harbour to walls that extended the bar out beyond the beach on the north and south side of the river. This was to give the trawlers a safe passage at any tide ... to exit of or enter river. It was otherwise very dangerous to exit of or enter river on a lower tide. The trawlers could easily capsize with the rough water. See the photographs below:



The Brunswick River with clean green water and far tidal rock wall. The upper channel goes up New Brighton north of Brunswick Heads. The rock wall shown was a place of spearfishing in the mid 1960's with a homemade speargun.



The Brunswick River with wall that extended the bar out beyond the beach.



The Brunswick River how it used to be in the early 1960's with clean green water and sandy estuarine beaches.

The local council began to build basalt boulder walls all along the river with a purpose built trawler harbour in the early 1960's.



Fishing Trawler going out to Sea

Saturday Nights At Brunswick Heads:

Often there would be communal Saturday night music concerts in the early 1960's in the park where the footbridge goes over to the surf beach. We would go down as a family to hear the concert. One the songs was **'What A Lovely Bunch Of Coconuts'** was a favourite. See the photographs below:



The footbridge goes over to the surf beach



Saturday Nights At Lismore: Occasionally we go over as a family to Lismore on a Saturday night in the early 1960's to window shop in the shops in the main street. This was a big family event as there was no television for consumer advertising. Lismore was big regional town and if you wanted to see what was happening, you went over to Lismore and looked in the shop windows. I was walking on ahead of the family and came across this square box with a square glass screen in it with a moving and flickering black and white picture playing across the glass screen. It was my first experience of television which had come to our regional area.

Soon after that, our neighbours, the Grahams who had a house near us, suddenly showed a tall metallic aerial above the roof of their house. They had bought television into our area. With their agreement we would go over on an occasional Saturday night and watch innocuous shows like **'Bonanza'**.

• **Canoeing:** I used to make these canoes out of a couple of hardwood weatherboards fasten together with nails at the front this frame was then covered with the cream painted tarpaper from off the walls of the converted packing shed across the creek Any possible leaks were then poured over with melted tar obtained by from disused batteries used in the old valve wireless we had then With use, the canoe developed a leak from the abrading of the tar paper ... I could paddle it to the far shallows before it sank ...I was showing off one day before some visitors on the bank with Mum

and Dad ... in my good clothes the canoe sank before I barely got launched ... I was feeling silly in my wet clothes



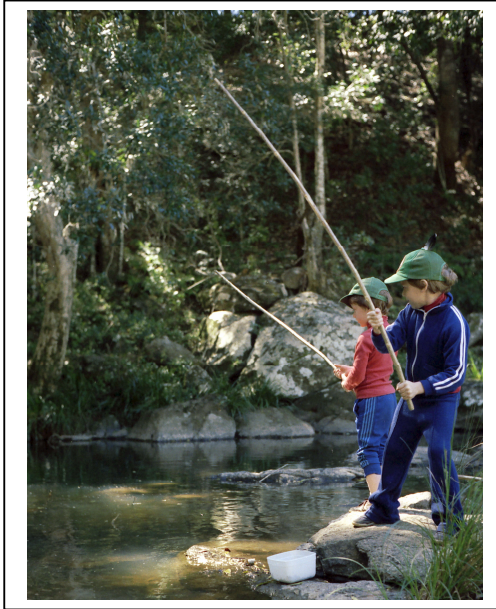
Canoe Frame of old flooring planks covered in tar -paper

• **Fishing in the creek:** there was always a great sense of wonder and excitement for me personally fishing off the middle rocks between the upper and lower pools for catfish, eels and especially mudgudgeons small fish of maximum length of 175 mm a monster at that length I would catch them on a short bit of line tied to a straight willow tree branch with a small hook and sinker and a cork float you could see them from 3.00 metres on the tan coloured river gravel on the pool bottom in the clear water a tin of worms could be obtained by turning over Mum's garden edging stones and finding them underneath in the moist red – brown soil worms which were thick and lively attracted the mudgudgeons with their twisting movement on the hook I would take my small catch proudly up to the house and I would get one of Mum's Vacola bottling lids on the slow combustion wood stove and cook my catch of fish in the 100 mm wide lid.

One big mudgudgeon I kept for about a year in a cut down old concrete wash tub near the tap near the upper laundry shed I turned it into an aquarium with 50 mm of clean river gravel in the bottom and a small blue flowering water lily obtained from way across on Watson's land from the billabong on the edge of the big Wilsons Creek Dam I used to feed it with worms everyday Eventually the fish would rise up and take worms from my fingers 20 mm out of the water.

We didn't eat catfish as they didn't have scales as per the Biblical injunction in the Old Testament I often gave these away to the Graham's, the neighbours on the adjacent property next door.

In 1992 fishing with Peter and Brett Aitken (Gerald's boys) on one of the infrequent family holiday visits to Wilsons Creek from Adelaide..... Brett catching an eel See picture below.



high brush box trees smooth tan trunks spreading into elongated branches ending in bunches of very dark green lanceolate leaves Small white flowers eventually retracting into dark brown cupped seed capsules bark is tan coloured with smooth but fibrous texture A steep 45 degree bank of red soil descends to the edges of the pool Interspersed with large rainforest trees and occasional tall thin trunked Leichhardt's Treeferns Elegant black trunks with an expanding whorl of 2.0 m long fronds bright summer sunlight broken up into shafts of golden light in amongst the tree canopy they strike the glass – like water in bright shafts of liquid gold probing the green depths amongst boulders and the occasional sunken log ... the shafts of light give way to solid shadows of rainforest green in the depths hiding the big 2.00 m long eel ... the light in other areas searching the washed tan – brown – cream river gravel creek bottom where the 400 mm long catfish has made it's concentric ringed nest of graded gravel the centre is a coarse gravel gives way to ripples of lighter gravel the dark shape of the catfish gracefully glides over the pool depths and slowly circulates over the ringed shapes the centre of the rings is where the eggs have been laid.

• **Skin Diving in the creek:** I made my first underwater mask out of a section of inner tyre tube stretched over a small face – sized frame from a cut down wooden lid of a banana crate which enclosed a single glass from a disused torch Sealed with tar obtained from spent batteries from the old style of valve radios I eventually graduated to my first store-bought mask which fitted more snugly in waterproof manner I remember swimming up the top rapid shallows the clear tumbling and eddying water among the rocks seeing the beautiful minnows cavorting in a school of glimmering gold with a stripe of crimson on their sides



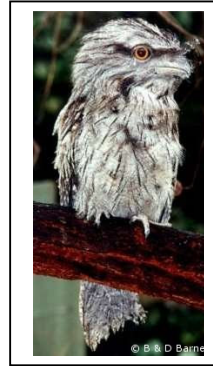
Pool 2= Lower Pool: looking down the pool of open still water edged by boulders and rainforest trees

Pool 2 = Lower Pool: we rarely swam in this pool as it didn't have a very good entry point into the water as kids was suddenly up to 2.00 m deep at the top end when it flowed over the top rock shelves then eventually got to 1.5 m then into underwater boulders at the far end at 100 + metres.

Description: a dark green rainforest pool overhung on the north-eastern side by 50 metre

On the south western side of the pool is a blue quandong tree (*Eleocarpus grandis*) now grown to 100 metres high in 2005 it had grown from a ten metre high tree in the 1970's a very fast growing tree with light fawn bark in splotches of darker browns merging with lighter browns 150 mm thick branches are splayed outwards in radiating pattern of ten metre

long limbs Branches end in bunches of dark lanceolate leaves with serrated edges in the right season, the tree has 30 mm. green globular fruit which eventually turned dark blue the leaves were a mixture of dark red and others being dark green These trees are frequent creekside trees and when the fruit falls into the creek or eaten by birds, the flesh rots off to leave a 20 mm wavy crenulated woody seed which gets washed down the creek with the river gravel in floodtime this often sprouts by the creek into a new tree to form fringing rainforest along the creek.



See the website:

Pool 3= Lower Pool: we rarely swam in here as there was not a good entry to the pool plus it was an uneven depth that was green and mysterious. I only fished here as it was good for catfish. A sloping rock shelf rolled down into the pool on the eastern side of the pool. See the photograph below.

www.aronline.net.au/factsheets/tawny_frogmouth.htm



Sheet Rock on the Other Side of the Creek: My memory is of Mum and myself over on the rock platform beside the creek across from the owls nest tree when we had barely moved into the house ... I was making moss houses out of all the green moss on the basalt rock.



- **The owls nest:** on the other side of this pool was a large rainforest tree. One afternoon in the early 1960's I found a tawny frogmouth owls nest in a fork of this tree. For some reason I impetuously decided to knock the nest down with a long stick and when it fell down it had four baby chicks in the nest. My mother was really cross with me for knocking the nest down. It is something which I didn't repeat again.

