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KANGAROOS ON FUJI-SAN?

Japan-based school turns purely international in Australia

By Hal Drake

Weekender Australia Contributor

JIMBOOMBA, Australia—It was a moment beheld by few—two kangaroos on the crown of Mount Fuji. They bounded easily from slope to summit and stood there, clearly etched in a misty, gold-dust dawn. At the approach of humans, they scampered away, clearing the mountain in one downward leap and taking cover in lowland bushes.

Nobody would have bothered them because authorities forbid climbers to scale Fuji-san—a ban for all seasons.

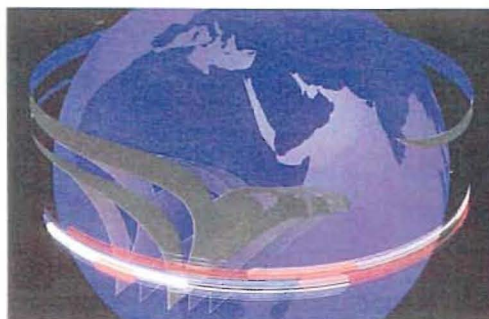
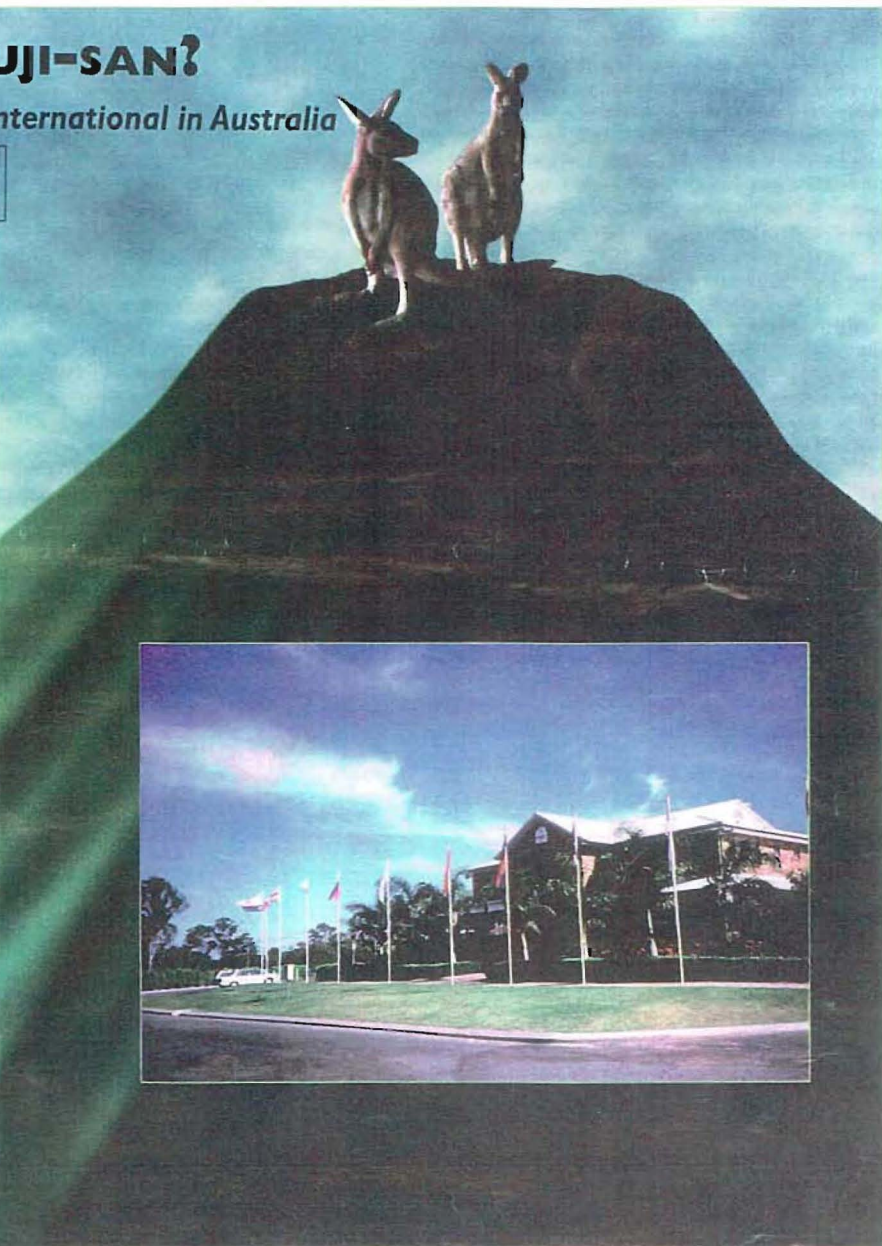
At the Hills Educational Foundation in rural Australia, the great mountain is a fragile runt, only a few meters high and easily displaced by the boots of lowlanders. It is there because of the creative notion of a gardener who wondered what to do with a pile of dirt, pushed aside as ground was cleared for the campus of a Japanese school in Queensland.

Why a kindergarten-through-high-school complex, born in Japan, on Australian grassland that once was grazing ground for cattle? Tetsuro Hirayama, headmaster of Tsushima Girls' Senior High School, wanted to raise a generation of internationalists who would disdain a century of sad mistakes and work toward a new and better millennium.

Of course, such a school, blue-printed in Japan and raised on Australia, would mix youngsters whose grandfathers might have gone for each other's hearts on New Guinea. But it couldn't stop there. "International!" didn't mean two nations, but all nations.

"It's very healthy that young people, even knowing the history of their forefathers, can still put that aside and get on with what matters," says foundation principal Alden S. Fielding. "And I guess that's what Mr. Hirayama's dream is all about. It's good to give

(Continued on Back Page)



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'Roos on Mount Fuji, landmark of Aussie int'l school

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young people the opportunity to know each other, to get a good education and to be useful world citizens in the future. Maybe the problems our grandfathers had will not emerge, ever again, because of this understanding."

Hirayama believes his global citizens can be beings of flexible and intelligent belief, able to ingest new ideas and still retain national identity. Hills can be a road out of rigid, one-way thinking.

Out front, before an administration building of pioneer brick, is a long bank of flags. The Kuomintang sunburst of Taiwan flaps beside the red, yellow-starred banner of Beijing. There is not a stitch of protest about recognition or sovereignty.

"We are a mini-United Nations, I suppose," says Fielding, stressing that this is an international school on Australian ground, not an Australian school that takes in foreign students. This is a mixture of Australians, Japanese, Koreans, Malaysians, Thais, Singaporeans, British, Filipinos, Chinese and Fijians, well stirred in and leavened by an occasional Yank.

Many saw only foreign films and tour groups before coming to Hills, which is 45 kilometers south of Brisbane and 90 inland kilometers from the resorts on Gold Coast. The surrounding community of Jimboomba is pretty and pastoral. But is miles from a McDonald's and to a citified Japanese, it might look Stygian. Fielding allows that there is concussive shock, but it doesn't last. He knows how to get shy, culture-shocked students together.

"If they don't mix naturally, we have contrived situations in which they have to come together," he asserts. There is the home system that blends students in dormitories named for mountains in home countries. Beside Fuji House, there is Halla-san, a famous height in South Korea, Jade House after a tall rise on Taiwan. Another dorm honors Ayers Rock, an altar-shaped plateau in northern Australia.

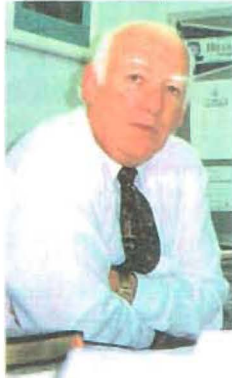
A feisty Scot totals four nationalities in her classroom, drilling them all impartially with borders and boundaries erased. An adopt-a-buddy program pairs a native English speaker with a second-language founding. English hopefully improves in an easy, conversational way, helped along by cultural perspective classes that may move from a Thai folktale to John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*.

This benevolently tells on students who can easily

compare where they are with where they come from.

Robert Miljkovic, a 16-year-old South African, grew up in Serbia and finds the warm and easy mix with international friends preferable to hand-me-down enmity toward Muslims. Siobahn Miller, 17, collects friends like bracelet charms and calls her move from New Zealand "the best I could have made." Her other school was large and impersonal—and not as international.

Claire Fang, a 16-year-old from Taiwan, made friends from 22 countries and keeps in touch with acquaintances in Spain.



Alden S. Fielding

Students can be moved to many callings—mathematician, chemist, accountant, linguist, perhaps even championship golf. Besides primary, junior high and high school levels, there is another that has some students straining on leash at the dismissal bell.

The Golf Academy

Hirayama was too Japanese not to build one. He knew that in Japan, golf was frequently restricted to wealthy businessmen who paid mortgage-priced membership fees and used the links as a kind of outdoor boardroom. No sport for poor commoners, this one—except at Hills, which has a challenging 18 holes and is open to students with skill and will.

That's Yuya Hosokawa, 16, who goes from a difficult academic day to three hours of coaching by campus-employed pros. And there is Hidetoshi Oshima, an 18-year-old who venerates Jack Nicklaus, with Tiger Woods a close runner-up. Fielding has to wonder if he will one day stand on an international course,



Mini Fuji situated behind scenic pond.

hear that pre-birdie silence and listen to applause for one of his students.

"A lot of them are doing golf," Fielding says, "because it is a very useful subject in terms of networking when they're businessmen and women. But their prime reason is to do an academic program so they can go on and do university work. Possibly, they can carry the two and move into a career in the golfing industry."

This is their university, Hosokawa and Oshima insist. Golf is their goal and grail as they perfect grip and stroke, working toward what they see as an inevitable career. But how many golfers, in this locker room or that clubhouse, will believe them as they tell of sharing a fairway with 15 kangaroos that might bound out of nowhere to spoil a crucial putt? Kangaroos are protected from wrathful response, even if they rupture rules by climbing Fuji-san, which came to be by accident.

Laying out course and campus, Hirayama also wanted a garden. He brought in a master draftsman of pond and stone, an expert who sat like a Hindu mystic and pondered for hours on where to emplace this rock or that tree. The pond came ahead of the mountain, which was at first excavated dirt as unsightly as a slag heap. Wasting nothing, the gardener molded it into the conical shape of a sacred mountain. The pond could be Lake Yamanaka, rippling under the great rise.

At Hills, Fuji-san may not be as eternal as its namesake. "We have a very large building to go up in front of it," Fielding says. "And then behind it, the Japanese garden will be landscaped into the building. Mount Fuji may cease to exist."



Above: Driving range on school links. Below: Get them together, mix them up, then teach. (Photos by Hal Drake)



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