

MOUNTAINS MADE OF GLASS

About an hour's drive north of Brisbane, Australia, in the jurisdiction of Caloundra City, a series of eleven craggy peaks rise above the land down under, known as the Glass House Mountains. The peaks were christened in 1770 when discovered by Captain James Cook, who wrote upon first sight, "These hills lie but a little way inland, and not far from each other: they are remarkable for the singular form of their elevation, which very much resembles a glass house, and for this reason I called them the Glass Houses."

Apparently, in 18th century Yorkshire, factories used glass furnaces; the 'house' to which Cook compared the mountains. Having been created from volcanic remnants of rhyolite and trachyte, and worn smooth by 25 million years of erosion, it's possible that the peaks are smooth as glass and relatively transparent. Yet how eleven majestic summits anchored on the Queensland coast could be compared to industrial fires in dismal north England is beyond me.

Each individual peak retains its Aboriginal name; most of which are such mouthfuls it seems scaling their faces are secondary to pronunciation. The tallest peak, Beerwah, is about 1,827 feet high. (For comparative purposes, Mt. Everest maintains its title of world's tallest at a staggering 29,028 ft.) The shortest is Miketebumulgrai, at about 653 feet.

As with most things, the native legend is much more interesting than the Cook-concocted namesake. Beerwah is known as the mother. She and the father peak, Tibrogargan, had many children, including two sets of twins, the Tunbubudla and the Coochin pairs. One day Tibrogargan noticed the sea swelling with impending flood, and sent his son Coonowrin to help

a pregnant Beerwah. Upon his disobedience, Tibrogargan struck Coonowrin so hard on the neck that he was unable to ever straighten it again. This peak is known as "Crook Neck."

After his siblings taunted him for his deformity, Coonowrin asked for forgiveness. Ashamed with his son's humility, Tibrogargan began to cry and never ceased. These tears form the many small streams that flow through the mountain's surrounding land. When Coonowrin again asked for forgiveness and explained that he had neglected to aid Beerwah because her massive size made her self-sufficient, his father turned his back on his son forever. Still today Tibrogargan sits opposite Coonowrin, and Beerwah is swollen with the child she never bore. The summit of Coonowrin is still teeters in shame, the area's tributaries still flow from his stone eyes.

It's not just the legend, however, that makes these mountains a travel destination. Each year the Glass House National Park draws throngs of international visitors for the 100 mile mountain run. The run includes the 'Mom and Pop' of the peaks (Beerwah & Tibrogargan), and is organized annually by the Glasshouse Mountains Advancement Network. If extreme sports aren't really your bag and you'd rather relax in the park's quiet serenity, the Glass House Eco-Lodge is a great place to start. Built entirely from recycled materials (an abandoned wooden church, a railway carriage) the lodge is a 'no-impact' zone where everything from gardening to composting is done on site. In good Birkenstock-wearing, dred-sporting fashion, they'll reward you with a fresh fruit smoothie if you arrive having taken public transportation.

If you ever find yourself on the Sunshine coast, these peaks are worth a peek.