

Conservation dividend case study

Skyrail Rainforest Cableway



Skyrail Rainforest Cableway showcases the oldest tropical rainforest on earth nestled within the Barron Gorge National Park, part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage protected area in North Queensland.

It is a privately owned business that was first opened in 1995 but has undergone several major upgrades and extensions. It involves 7.5 kilometres of cableway and 32 towers; it is powered by electric motor and incorporates solar power within the gondolas and at the stations and terminals. The cableway has 114 gondolas that can ferry up to 650 passengers per hour.

The Skaireil experience allows visitors to glide metres above the rainforest canopy with stopping points at two rainforest mid-stations to explore the forest floor below. The experience takes approximately 1.5 hours one way or 2.5 hours return and includes a Ranger Guided Tour.

When construction of the Skaireil was completed it was the world's longest gondola cableway at the time.

Compatible with natural and cultural values

The Skaireil project required application of world-first construction techniques and remains one of the most environmentally sensitive cableway projects in the world.

Skaireil has received numerous awards, including the 2010 Hall of Fame for Sustainable Tourism by the Queensland Tourism Awards. It is also accredited by

EarthCheck (EC3 Global) as a Master, holds Advanced Ecotourism – Green Travel Leader and are a Climate Action Innovator (Ecotourism Australia).

Skaireil's tower sites were selected to coincide with existing canopy gaps, they were surveyed to ensure no threatened or endangered species would be affected by construction.

Before construction commenced on the tower sites, the operator received approval to collect and stockpile the leaf litter, top soil and plant seedlings for reintroduction when construction was complete. Plant seedlings were catalogued at each site, then removed to be housed in a rainforest nursery and propagated during construction. Upon completion of construction the seedlings were re-planted in their original locations and the saved top soil and leaf litter was replaced.

The two rainforest mid-stations were designed to blend in with the surrounding rainforest and minimise environmental impact and were built in pre-existing clearings.

Sustainable design and operation of facilities

The tower footings were built largely by hand, up to 5 metres deep in some cases, using picks and shovels. No roads were built during Skaireil's construction; workers

walked to the remote tower sites each day, carrying their equipment.

Helicopters were used extensively to assist construction. The helicopters were used to carry equipment, materials and cement to tower sites and rainforest stations. The helicopters carried their loads on 100-metre long lines to avoid generation of wind turbulence that would affect the sensitive rainforest canopy.

The towers were flown in in sections and assembled on site. The cableway haul rope was then laid and tensioned across towers by the helicopters.

Conservation dividend

The Skyrail Rainforest Foundation was established by the company in 2005, with the primary objective of raising and distributing funds to support tropical rainforest research and education projects. The foundation hosts and participates in tree planting and eco-friendly activities for the community in conjunction with the local regional council.

The vision of the foundation is: 'The protection of tropical rainforests worldwide through sound management, understanding and appreciation through research and education'.

In order to directly contribute to enhancing ecological value, money raised by the foundation are paid into the Skyrail Rainforest Research Fund, which is administered for a number of environmental research purposes. Since inception, the foundation has provided more than \$467,032 to research projects.

Skyrail Rainforest Cableway are proud of what they do to protect and showcase the oldest tropical rainforest on Earth and welcome hundreds and thousands of visitors each year without impacting the environment.

