

Introduction to SFS Research Site and Students

Where is The School for Field Studies (SFS) Center for Rainforest Studies located?

The SFS Center for Rainforest Studies is located in Australia's tropical North Queensland. Here, cradled in a narrow, broken belt along the northeast coast, lies the country's only remaining rainforest. The research site lies at 800 meters elevation in the northern foothills of Atherton Tableland. The 153-acre site—called “Warrawee”—aboriginal for “You are welcome here,” is surrounded by World Heritage forests.

What problems does the rainforest face? What actions has the Australian government taken to preserve this fragile ecosystem?

The Australian rainforest has suffered the same fate as most other rainforests around the world. Agriculture, ranching, mining, and logging have destroyed and disrupted habitat. Unlike most tropical countries, however, Australia moved quickly to confront the threats to its rainforest. In 1988, most were declared protected under World Heritage designation. The decision was very controversial, and is still not accepted by some Queensland residents.

How's the weather in the Australian rainforest?

At 17 degrees south latitude, the area has two seasons: wet and hot, or cool and relatively dry. The Australian summer stretches from November to March, and can produce heavy rains and soggy roads. The dry season arrives in April, along with night temperatures that can sink as low as freezing.

Who are the student researchers? What are they doing while living in the rainforest?

The student researchers are college students selected by SFS who have come to the Australian rainforest to get involved in real research projects. They take courses, write papers and collaborate with scientists to collect data about the rainforest. Working with the people who live there, the students use their research results to develop programs that will help protect the animal and plant life that live in the rainforest.

What types of animals do SFS students see at the research site?

SFS students see a variety of vertebrates at the research site, including marsupials (musky rat kangaroo, Lumholtz's tree kangaroo, red legged pademelons, bandicoots, and several species of possums), reptiles (at least 10 species of snakes, leaf-tailed gecko, and forest dragons), several species of frogs, and many species of birds (brush turkeys, sulfur-crested cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets, and cassowaries).

Where do the SFS students live?

The SFS students live in dormitory rooms in Warrawee which is secluded and relatively remote. The nearest town is Yungaburra (population 500), a twenty minute ride by car.

It is not luxury living. All SFS students are expected to share in cooking, cleaning, and other chores. They eat breakfasts of cereal and fruit; lunches of peanut butter, cheese, and meat sandwiches; and hot suppers of vegetarian and meat dishes.

What is a typical day like for SFS students?

Students are expected to be physically fit and are busy from morning to night. A typical schedule is:

0730. Breakfast
0830 to 1200 . Lectures
1200. Lunch
1300. Field work (lecture, field work, research)
1830. Dinner
2000. Guest lecture, meetings (when required)

In addition to the above, each SFS student must serve on a four-person cooking crew with meal and clean-up responsibilities about once a week. Each person also serves on a committee; committees are responsible for recycling glass and aluminum, maintaining the compost pile, or helping to organize field trips. Finally, each week SFS students participate in a "Warrawork" session, in which students and staff clean dormitories, wash vehicles, and plant trees.