

# Collecting Information

A lot of what we want to know about a property is readily available if we know where to ask.

We can differentiate between two types of information.

- a) Information we can gather of the property.
- b) Information we collected ourselves on the land.

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## Information Collected Off - Property

### INFORMATION WANTED:

### SOURCE:

resources, natural wealth (minerals, timber)	mineral maps, geological maps, maps of all kinds — army, shire, orthophoto, cadastral, historical. Maps from utility authorities (e.g. electricity)
shape and size of land	RP (real property plans) from titles office, title deed (from owner, solicitor, trustee)
natural disasters (flooding, cyclones, lava flows)	local historical society, local council, Dept. of Primary Industries, agricultural dept.
water catchment: quality and size	contour maps, water authority, aerial photographs
soil, general	soil maps, Dept. of Primary Industries, agriculture dept., soil conservation officer
aerial photos	Dept. of Mapping and Surveying
available utilities (power, phone, water, sewerage, gas, garbage collection)	local office of appropriate authority; often located in your shire or Town Hall
zoning, zoning history	shire/Town Council — ask for Town Planner
wind, rainfall, temperature	office of meteorology Local farmers

## INFORMATION COLLECTED — ON SITE

Accept local knowledge willingly. Local knowledge may usually be obtained from current and previous owners. Long-term residents may be able to share wisdom you will recognise as an important pattern. Inquisitive children are most likely to know about hidden and difficult to access places. Listen to all, record the important, dismiss none.

I generally prefer to follow this pattern when first visiting a property.

1. Walk along or within clear view of the property boundary.
2. Walking **up** gullies is generally easier; before
3. strolling **down** ridges.
4. Transect property at a number of places.

Remember that observation is the designer's most important tool!

Look for:

- on and off site resources — millable timber, accumulated mulch, sand deposits in the creek, wild berries, seeds, stone suitable for building
- plants — the useful, the apparently useless and the problematic, noxious, poisonous; check for size, health, vigour
- signs of animal (domesticated and wild) activity: sightings, nests, droppings, scratching
- watercatchment — quality, sign of erosion, slips
- aspect — including micro climate
- signs of logging and burning
- storm damage — direction

- identify Keyline, dam sites
- slope gradient
- likelihood of frost
- drainage patterns, flooding, springs
- suitability for access — current and future
- special features (windmill sites, hydraulic rams)
- visual, noise, air pollutants
- historical features (ancient and recent)
- fences

All observations should be taken down and maybe marked on a rough map.

#### Collect:

- soil samples, water samples, plant samples for later identification
- take photos, draw sketches

## COSTING

At the end of your site visit you will have spent some time and money. Some experience will allow you to quote to your clients the approximate cost. After your visit you will be required to indicate (verbally or in writing) the cost of your services. The list below gives you the most important items you need to consider in each case. You will need to fill in the relevant rates. Remember to up-date them at regular intervals.

- travel cost (per km/mile)
- your hourly rate
- overheads
- cost of office equipment — paper, pencils ...
- computer use
- phone, including rental
- fax, including rental
- postage
- photocopies
- maps
- soil tests
- water tests
- outside consultants
- aerial photo
- typing costs
- rent
- insurance
- apprentices

## METHOD OF DESIGN

- Observation (observation can be learned)  
When 'observing', try to concentrate on this one task and not look for solutions. You will need substantial experience before you can leap from an observation mode into design-solution thinking.
- Observations are lessons learned from nature. Because of observation we know if something works or grows. We know it does work.
- As designers we have to decide  
where something will work  
how it will work  
why it works.
- Will it be practical? Is it functional and sustainable? Does it fit our ethics?
- Some observations are natural laws or part of natural chains ...  
Take the frog. We may observe many frogs or very few. This 'one observation can point to habitat — e.g. a very suitable habitat (the presence of water) or unsuitable habitat (wetlands have been drained). Since we know that insects are a major part of a frog's food-source, we can deduce that insect numbers would be affected (the frog as a predator). On the other hand we know that the frog is food to birds, fish and often humans (the frog as food).

The observation, alone, of 'many frogs' can be useful. 'Not to see frogs' may not trigger any great understanding of what is going on. We may need to observe many insects, relatively few frogs and an absence of frog-predacious birds to lead us to the conclusion that something is wrong.

*The design should attempt to take the observations into consideration e.g. replace a wetland, create a habitat.*

Our body is a reliable instrument to note changes. Ask ourselves the questions: Is it warmer? cooler? more humid? less windy? ... If desirable, how can we copy it? reduce the effect? utilise the benefits?

Through this method we can find micro climates, aspect-related trees, natural guilds (combinations).

We can also use technical instruments to make similar observations. Examples are rain gauges and min/max thermometers.

Copying nature — finding examples  
Sometimes we will be finding examples in nature, which, while interesting and important for our understanding of natural cycles, need to be modified for our needs.

One example is rainforest re-generation.