

photo finish

Forget about shooting the scenery. When Sally Feldman suffered a technical hitch on a travel assignment, she had a whole other object in her sights

So, there we were, reviewing a weekend's worth of photographs on the TV screen back in our hotel room on a tiny, highly photogenic island in the Tasman Sea. The wonders of technology! All hail the digital camera, we crowed. All that editing-on-the-run of dud images we'd gleaned on our travels, without the developing costs of film. And with our combined photographic talents this had always been a costly business, leading as it did to us invariably turving out 35 of 36 photographs per roll. What cost-saving. What time-saving. And all that information-saving that was going on in that cunning little square of plastic, ready to be transferred safely on to the computer when we got home. All those bits and bytes and pixels and whatnots stashed neatly in their tiny techno-drawers. Wasn't technology wonderful! Weren't we clever having mastered it!

Yes, there we were, perched on the bed, marvelling at those wondrous views we'd captured, without the handicap of squinting through a viewfinder or the sound of overstrained hearts pounding in our ears after climbing too fast and too hard up some godforsakenly vertiginous bush track. We were fairly bursting with pride at our compositional skills, at the subtle nuances of cloud over mountain, of cliffs blushed by sunrise, of endangered species posing conveniently on a gate post. This was indeed a trip to remember, to store on our hard drive for posterity! We poured ourselves another glass of resort-priced pinot noir and toasted that little motherboard and all who sailed in her.

But then he had to start fiddling, didn't he. He just had to faff around with the camera settings to check all was well.

And he had to press that 'okay' button, didn't he, instead of the 'cancel' button. And then we had to watch, our eyes gradually widening and mouths slowly gaping into silent Munch-like screams

reminiscent of those hungry seabird chicks we'd zoomed in on with Attenborough-like fervour at five-o'-bloody-clock in the morning. We watched, our hearts once again pounding insanely, as that crisp blue line moved smoothly across the screen, wiping those digital moments one by one. One hundred and eighty moments, to be precise, all of which took about five seconds to delete – rather less time than they had taken to gather.

After I'd been disarmed and sedated, it was time to consider our options. Divorce? Not terribly practical on a small island whose only law enforcer seemed to spend his time enforcing the 25km speed limit, the wearing of bicycle helmets and the safe passage of dopey muttonbirds from the middle of the highway in the dead of night. I suspected there might not be a lawyer within 700km, either, although a couple of people we'd encountered here looked as though they might have had the occasional brush with one.

A couple of feverish phone calls to the mainland finally provided a glimmer of hope. What was done could be undone – with some potential casualties

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(apart from the minor bruising over my husband's right eye). What was lost could be found, as long as we could find the right software. But there was to be no more photography for these two sharp-shooters. We would override the memory card at our peril.

What to do? A traveller without a camera is like a muttonbird without a bicycle... or something. But we decided that we should try out a concept that had been, up until then, utterly foreign to us – to live in the moment. To hell with recording our experiences; they would be emblazoned on our memories forever, or at least until the following weekend. We ordered our cook-your-own-barbecue-on-the-beach backpack and set off to climb a No. 4 (tougher than a No. 3, but nowhere near as scary as a No. 5).

And what a liberation it was – to walk and wonder and stumble over tree roots without the encumbrance of that third eye demanding our attention. We embraced the day and the day embraced us warmly back, showering us with view after magnificent view. The fragrance of native jasmine scented our way and a gentle breeze cooled our beading brows, and, at the lookout high above the island, we watched seabirds wheeling and diving in a display worthy of *Dancing with the Stars*. "Great shot," said my husband, just before I pushed him over the cliff. **VE+T**

Postscript: The author would like to pay tribute to the patience of Dave Reed, photo-whiz extraordinaire, of Harvey Norman Moore Park, for retrieving her photographs, thus saving the day and, quite possibly, her marriage.

