

## What brought YOU to Wootton?

Caro and Michael Badcock



We weren't going to tell our story just yet but since we have been here 10 years this June the timing is probably appropriate. Not locals yet, but hopefully on the way.

Back in 2001 we became empty nesters and were thinking about where we wanted to be in our lives and what we wanted to do. Mike had always wanted to farm and we thought that it was now or never. We had no commitments except to ourselves so we could afford to take some risks so we started looking.

Although Mike wanted to become a full time farmer, aiming for around 200 acres, we did need to balance that with Caro's ongoing career so we did the usual: started with a radius of a couple of hundred kilometres of Sydney, down to the Southern Highlands, out to Mudgee and Gloucester and up to Taree. It very quickly became clear that we didn't want to go south or west (the drive over the mountains every Friday was not on!). So, north it was. We looked at properties as far out as north west of Gloucester, up on the Comboyne plateau, out to Belbora and all points in between. We were beginning to despair. When we asked to see farming properties we were shown farms with hardly a tree in sight. When we asked for trees we were shown "hobby blocks" with no pastures in sight and usually on the side of mountain! In addition, it very quickly became clear that the Friday night commute was going to be a challenge.

We thought we had found our place several times. First, the owner came back with a counter offer substantially more than the listed price. (Apparently the new boyfriend decided the property had been on the market for so long it was worth more!) On the rebound we saw this property in Newmans Road while the owner was considering if he wanted to sell. We fell in love with it but it was sold to someone else. We were gazumped on a property over on Buckett's Way and were feeling pretty desperate by this time. The week we were moving out of our family home of 22 years Mike was going to make an offer on a property to the south of Bulahdelah and Caro was in Melbourne for business. Mike left Caro a message saying that he had put an offer on a place but not the place she thought he was putting an offer on! Needless to say Caro was very concerned as they hadn't seen any other properties. Lo and behold, the property in Newmans Road had come back on the market after the new owners had been in there 6 weeks and Mike had jumped at the chance to purchase. That weekend we were going to Taree anyway so stopped off on the way, hoping that we had made the right decision. It was one of those fabulous days in March where there are no clouds, the sky is just brilliant blue and the world is wonderful. We knew we had done the right thing, couldn't believe our luck and were very nervous until we actually had the key (to a very old house) in our hands.

Since then, Mike has spent his time learning how to farm, experiencing the highs and lows of breeding animals, attending various workshops and improving the property. He has built kilometers of new fences to protect creeks, create wildlife corridors and make smaller paddocks to assist in pasture improvement and cattle handling. Caro spent the first four and a half years commuting to Sydney on a weekly basis and the last five and a half years working from home in her own consulting business which she continues to do. They have built a new house (but typical of owner builders not completely finished it or the landscaping), can be seen on the roads around Wootton running or riding their mountain bikes or in the café on a Sunday morning recovering from their long ride.

**Written by Caro Badcock**

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