

Heart of the Nation Photography Claire Reynolds and Chrissie Hall

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**Moulamein
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It's not that Claire Reynolds and Chrissie Hall have filthy minds or anything. It's just that when they were planning their photography road trip around Australia, they needed a theme for the project – and what they decided on was “Pure and Dirty”.

“Every picture we took had to be either pure or dirty, or pure *and* dirty,” explains Reynolds. “And with a theme like that, nakedness is the first thing that comes to mind.” Indeed, the new book they've produced from those travels is chock-full of bare flesh – their own, and other people's. They've turned their cameras, unflinchingly, on it all.

The ConFest alternative lifestyle festival near Moulamein in NSW – a “clothing optional” event which owes its origins to the late politician Jim Cairns – was a particularly rich source of subject matter. “This photo shows people who've just come out of the mud bath,” says Reynolds, 35. “It was like a ritual to bathe in it then roll around in the

leaves.” In keeping with the spirit of the event, she and Hall were themselves naked – except for the cameras around their necks – for much of the time. “Neither of us is a naturist, but we're both very comfortable in our own skins,” she says.

The idea of getting your kit off among a bunch of naked strangers in the bush is pretty wacky, to be sure. But maybe there's an element to it that's curiously Australian, too. Nakedness is, after all, a great leveller. “There's an overwhelming feeling of equality,” Reynolds says of the experience. “Everyone is the same, nobody is any better than anyone else. There are no walls between people.”

You can only take that philosophical stuff so far, though. Check out the bloke in the right of the picture: his entire body is caked in mud and yet somehow he's managed to keep his glasses spotlessly clean. Is it because he doesn't want to miss anything?

ROSS BILTON