

Australia

21 January - 6 February 2006



Jan & Martin Oakes

Chapter 1 ~ The beginning.

I'm not sure who wrote that every story has a beginning a middle and an end and should be told that way.

September 2005. We park in Rockford.

“Jan, there is a travel agent, let's go look at books on Australia.” A not too enthusiastic grunt, but Jan acquiesces. We ask and pick up every book in sight. We have been talking about this for five years, but Jan dreads the length of the flight.

Back home, I do some research on the internet, and outline the places I would like to visit. To my surprise, Jan has her own list of ‘must sees.’ We each sit down going through the tour books. “Jan, I have found one that matches all our places to see.”

“So have I.” Replies Jan.

We compare and find we have both picked the same trip and itinerary. No looking back now!

January 2006. The Sunday before departure.

John and Larry invited us for Sunday brunch, a little unusual, but who could refuse such a nice invitation. At 10:30 a.m. sitting at their bar, my Bloody Mary tasted pretty good. The door bell rang, and in walked Sue (Miller). Quite a surprise. She nonchalantly announced she had just stopped by on the off chance of seeing us before we left. We suspected nothing. Then the rest of the gang arrived. Our quiet Sunday brunch turned in to a party. You would have thought we were emigrating not going on a vacation. The guys had a cake with a map of Australia on it. Jan ate Sydney! Then there were the gag gifts. A stuffed Koala with a bib reading, “take me home to mommy.” And a pen shaped as a Kangaroo which boxed when you pressed its back. We departed for home around 7:00 p.m.

Friday, 20 Jan, 2006. Departure.

Larry picked us up and delivered us to the bus terminal. Boy was the bus full. Glad we caught it at the terminal. Where is everybody going?

“Get in line, find an empty *machine* and put in your details.” Snapped the American Airlines people director. “Ugh?” They look like ATM machines. I approach one and determine it has a touch screen. It demands “Destination, flight, name etc” and spits out a boarding pass. Then I realize I left Jan behind. Repeat procedure. Hey, I'm getting good at this.

As we taxied out it started snowing. Captain, “We are going to be delayed a little, we have to be de-iced.” Now let's not mess around, we don't have that much spare time.

We left 1¼ hrs late. Great seats to L.A., exit row. Sprawl! As it turned out we had four hours to wait in LA before the Qantas flight at 10:30 p.m. I had an aisle seat. The leg room was better than we expected.

The young lady sitting in the window seat next to Jan had just flown in from Ireland, a twenty hour flight. She had taken valium and went to sleep while we were waiting for take off. The plane roared and bucked at take off. Young lady wakes in a panic, thinking we are crashing. After Jan pulled her from the ceiling, she went back to sleep and missed all the good meals.

It requires an advanced degree in computer technology to use the TV controller in the arm rest. I actually don't graduate until our return flight to LA. So I spent most of the flight listening to a book reading of the 'Da Vinci Code' which Robin had loaned me. Chicken curry and a small bottle of wine should have made us sleep but neither of us did.

We cross both the International Date Line, losing a day, and the Equator. We sort of felt we should have received a certificate or something.

It was mostly a smooth flight; no turbulence. Three hours out from Sydney and time for breakfast. I just got my coffee and we hit. Now I know why the lap trays have a little lip around them. Well, half a cup was all I needed.

Cruising at 40,000ft the temperature was -71°F. The most interesting feature on the TV mounted back of the seat in front was a GPS screen showing our flight path, position and elapsed time. We passed close to, but south of Hawaii, and were at all times over the ocean. Our journey was 7,550 miles lasting 14 hours, somewhat less than I expected.

Sydney airport was extremely busy. There were long lines of people waiting to clear customs and immigration. We had no problems but several people in front of us were flagged with some kind of anomaly with their paperwork.

Security is tight. To our surprise, our luggage is X-rayed as we exit customs. Never seen that before. Australia is most concerned about pestilence. There are bins to throw away any fruits or food. No banana chips! What have they got? Now I know why I don't eat them.

What a crowd of greeters. We found several ladies wearing yellow jackets who seemed to be directing us arrivals. One kindly escorted us to our tour director, Sue (Gibbons.) Now we felt comfortable. Someone was responsible for us. We learn that there are about 35 persons on the tour, some 22 arrived on the same flight as ourselves.

“Whatever you do, don't sleep when you get to your room,” advises Sue.

Sydney had been very warm but its temperatures had calmed down to a comfortable 88°F. Tired, we relax in the coach and don't take much notice of the big busy streets. Seat belts in a coach? We learn that wearing them is required by law.

The [Sydney Harbour Marriott](#) hotel is welcome. Please insert room key in elevator to request floor.

Chapter 2 ~ Sydney, Sunday January 22.

The Marriott has the most enormous foyer I have seen.

Several floors high. Apparently it was gutted and remodeled when it changed hands. On one side a waterfall slides down a wall and ripples across a couple of ponds filled with black pebbles. In the distance to our right is the bar and restaurant.

We change into shorts. Oh, it's so nice and warm! Let's walk. Under the train tracks, we head for the harbor. It's beautiful. The streets are so clean.

We are walking along what is best described as a board walk., although much of it is concrete. To our right is the water of Sydney Cove. A half mile away on an extended point is the Opera House. "Jan, they talked so much about it as a concrete structure. That's not concrete, its tile." Beautiful gold and beige tile. It gleams in the sun. Very different than the descriptions I had read.

We continue walking and pass open air restaurants. The famous [Sydney Harbour Bridge](#), known by locals as the 'Coathanger,' comes in to view ahead and slightly to our left, with its tall arch. For an outrageous price you can walk (climb) up the arch.

We are circling '[The Rocks](#),' a hill about 100 ft above water level, upon which sits the Observatory.

Passing under the bridge we see lines of wharves converted into condominiums, each with its own mooring for a boat, of which there are plenty. Must be moneyed folk here. Blocked by a long row of stone houses clinging to the Rocks we ascend a steep carved staircase, Lower Fort Street Stairs. We are both winded by the time we reach the top and are glad to sit and admire the view.

A welcome bar, with outside tables along the waterfront, beckons. Time for a sandwich. We sit. Nothing happens. So I study the menu and watch the patrons. A light turns on in my head. I go order at the counter, pay and receive a vibrating pager. It is self service, but cooked to order. Food is expensive, though I am sure we are paying tourist prices. A chicken salad for Jan, barbecued chicken with fries for me, two beers and a pop cost \$50.

Sydney is ringed by modest hills rising steeply from the water. Homes with red tiled roofs cling to the slopes. Green trees occupy any vacant space. The contrasting colors create a pretty picture. The waterfront reminds us of Toronto.

Sydney has so many islands and coves. There are boats everywhere. Ferries head in all directions. It must be a traffic nightmare. Some of the ferries were so large they might be mistaken for small cruise ships.

Back at the hotel we clean up and head back out into the business district. Sky scrapers, glass fronts and up-scale shops are typical of any successful city. This could be London

or Chicago. But wait, the people are different. We are in the business district. Black suits, white shirts and ties are everywhere. Sometimes there is no jacket. Even the ladies are wearing business attire. Five percent of the population is Chinese. Perhaps my sample was of a younger group, but there seemed to be fewer overweight people than in the USA.

Back at the hotel, our tour group sat nervously around a small raised dais making polite conversation. Time for orientation. Dispensing with the dais, Sue handed out envelopes and small pins with our first names.

“Please wear them, it will help identify you as a member of an APT tour.”

We learn about ‘Pink Sheets.’ These to record details of our next departure, meal times and when to put out luggage. Thirty five individuals could soon create chaos.

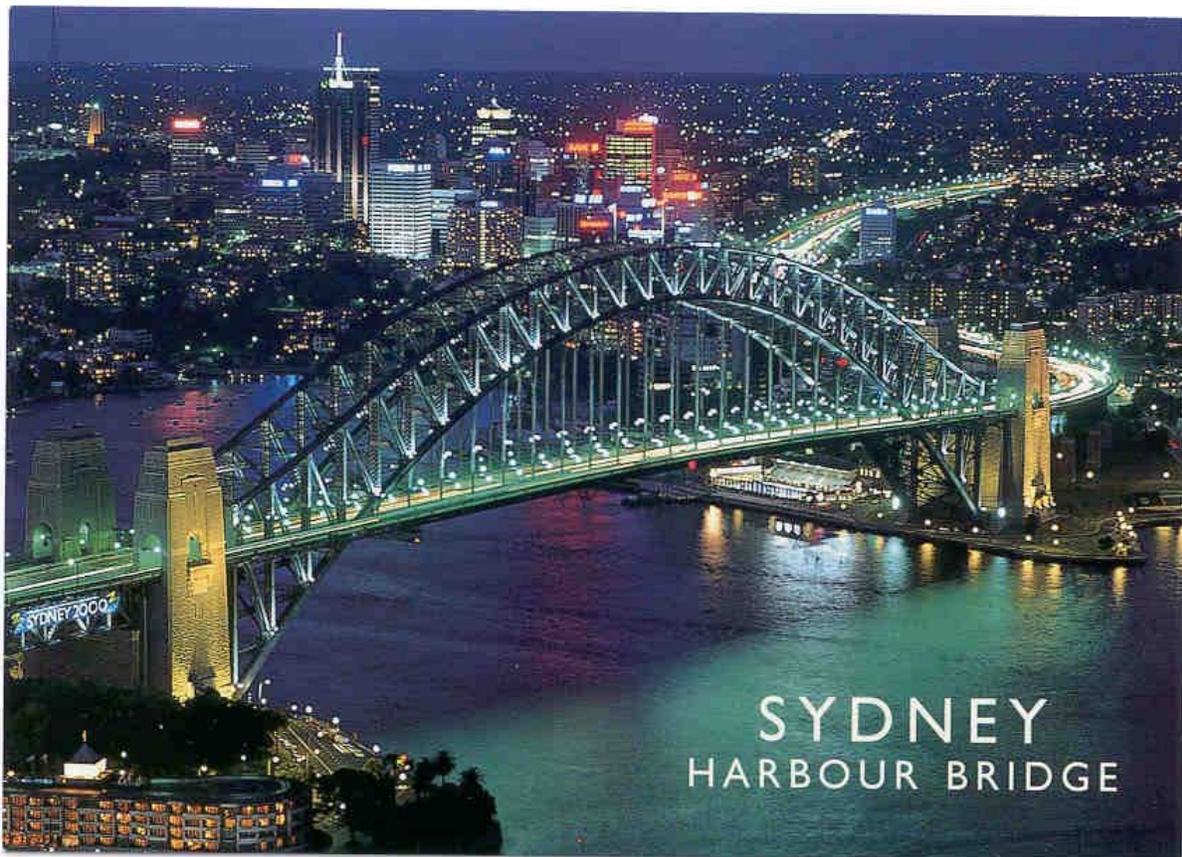
A beverage, buffet dinner and bed.



sydney



australia



famous bondi beach

Chapter 3 ~ Sydney in a day. Monday January 23.

A short bus ride brought us to [Costellos](#) of opal fame. There a film introduced us to the mining techniques and when samples were passed around we had a “feel” for opal. Yes we had to hand back the \$10,000 black opal from Lightning Ridge.

At the harbour, [Circular Quay](#), we board our boat for a cruise.

“Let’s sit in the sun.” We did. “Cooking oil please Jan.”

Magnificent views of the Bridge and Opera House, just like those on stamps in my philatelic collection.

We sail along the shore listening to the narration. “And there is the topless beach.” My camera does not have sufficient magnification.....

It looks like we reached the ocean. Time to turn back. We return along the opposite shore. Lots of stories about the early days, forts, penitentiary colonies, lack of food. It must have been terrible in 1770.

Fishing is banned due to toxins leaching from a land fill into the harbor.

We have just one half hour for lunch. Contrast that with what we just heard!

At the quay. “I will have a meat pie and chips to go.” It costs more to ‘eat in.’ Which just means at a table adjacent to the kiosk. We walk a few yards to the waterside and fight off a couple of opportunistic seagulls.

The bus resumes its tour of this wonderful city. Here the major landmarks, and then the ‘burbs.’ The streets are narrow for a bus. Most cars are small. The row homes are called gun barrel houses. Short in width but long from front to back. And all those beautiful iron work railings made from the pig ballast of old sailing ships.

It seems strange to see names like 7-Eleven and Mc Donalds. We learn a new language. A City Ranger is a Parking Cop. and children are Vegemites.

Sydney was founded as a penal colony, chosen for its harbor and source of fresh water, the Tank Stream, which still flows beneath the city as part of the stormwater system.

Time for the group picture. Sue, “ Please, even if you don’t want to buy, be a part of the group picture.” Why not. The bus stopped at [Mrs. Maquaries Point](#) with a magnificent view of the Opera House and Sydney Bridge. Our photographer had us sit or stand on a series of steps. ‘Snap’ and we went into the APT hall of fame. A good shot.

Now for famed [Bondi Beach](#). I imagined miles of white sand. Perhaps like Fort Lauderdale or Cancun. But Bondi is a cove about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile long, beautiful, but surrounded by homes and buildings. I was not disappointed, but it was totally different from what I



expected. It resembles an English seaside resort. And I only saw one topless young lady. We have only a short time to walk and visit the Pavilion.

Time to change in the hotel and off to the Opera.

The Sydney Bridge is so huge that from a distance the [Opera House](#) loses proportion. But it is huge too. We assemble in the foyer and are allocated a tour guide.

“Would anyone like the elevator tour?” asks our lady guide, “because the walking tour has over two hundred steps.” Although a mature group, none of us is willing to admit we are so infirm. Several in our party start counting, at 300 we all give up.

Conceived in the late 1950's by the Danish architect Jorn Utzon, the 'sails' of the roof were beyond the engineering capabilities of the time. The problem was not solved until 1961. Cost over runs and non payment of fees resulted in Utzon's resignation in 1966. The construction was completed by others in 1973.

It has about 1000 rooms, including five theatres, five rehearsal studios, two main halls, four restaurants, six bars and numerous souvenir shops. We see the roof tiles up close. 1,056,000 glazed granite tiles, imported from Sweden. Exposed concrete has been polished to a sheen with soda water; strange. The House interior is composed of pink granite mined from Tarana, NSW. Australian woods bring color and luster to the building.

A rehearsal is in progress in the main Concert Hall. We sit in the Opera Theatre watching stage hands constructing a set, the comfortable seats acoustically designed. The Studio, as it's name suggests, is a small intimate space used for night club style shows. The Utzon room is the first decorated in a design by the original architect, now reconciled with the project.

Outside I walk away in the evening sun, trying to fit the enormous structure in the viewfinder of my camera.

Our destination, [Arias](#), overlooking the harbour and Opera House, is one of Sydney's finest restaurants.

Sydney



1. Sydney, outside the Marriott.



2. Pedestrian Mall.



10. Hickson Road, Sandstone buildings.



6. Circular Quay, & Marriott.

2. Sydney.



20. Converted Wharf.



21. Observatory at The Rocks.



33. Sydney Skyline.

3. Sydney



40. Admiralty House.



41. Kirribilli.



44. The Rocks.

4 Sydney



49. Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House.



55. Bondi Beach.



66. The Opera House.

Chapter 4 ~ The Blue mountains, Tuesday January 24th

After a buffet breakfast, our ever ready coach picks us up on a cool dull day at 8:00a.m. The excursion to the Blue Mountains is an optional extra. Only about a half dozen from our APT tour have chosen to go. At the terminal we transfer to a group bus which is full and meet Robbie, our driver. We cross the Anzac Suspension Bridge and follow the M4 motorway past Homebush, site of the 2000 Olympics.

The docklands are being redeveloped to encourage inner city dwelling, and most heavy shipping has moved from Sydney Harbour to Botany Bay. We pass Federation homes, brick built in the early 1900's with slate or terracotta roofs. Modern homes are brick veneer with concrete tile roofs. Lots of flowering trees and oh, so green.

Parramatta Road is 'auto alley.' Why are there nets over the car lots? To protect them from hail storms. Gas is \$1.17 AU/liter or about \$3.60 US/gal. Our driver points out a speed camera. Tickets for a moving violation come in the post with a picture of your car.

Sydney is a sprawling city of 4 million people. We still have not reached the country. I am struck by the sea of TV antennas, there is no cable and satellite is not popular.

The [Blue Mountains](#) are named for the blue haze reflected by droplets of oil suspended in the atmosphere from the eucalyptus trees. Eucalypts shed bark not leaves. Although only 3,000ft high, the Blue Mountains were an incredible obstacle to westward travel, and not conquered until 1813. The first road, completed in six months, was too steep for horse and carriage, but opened access to the agricultural and grazing country to the west. Today, 55,000 people live in this area in 26 townships.

After a winding climb through eucalypt trees into the Blue Mountains National Park, we reach Leura, a pretty country village famous for its gardens. The streets are lined with Agapanthus, a long stemmed white lily. Our stop is short. Clouds are billowing about us.

We stop at Echo Point to view the [Three Sisters](#), stone pillars, but are thwarted by the clouds. Legend has it that three sisters were turned to stone.

A short drive to the [Scenic Railway](#), the steepest in the world, and originally part of the Katoomba mining tramways constructed between 1878 and 1900. We climb into a car and plummet down the cliff into a rain forests. We wander in a world of lichens, mosses and tree ferns. A series of elevated boardwalks lead us through the forest to the Flyway Bottom Station where we catch a cable car back to the cliff top. The veil of mist clears and we catch a glimpse of the Three Sisters.

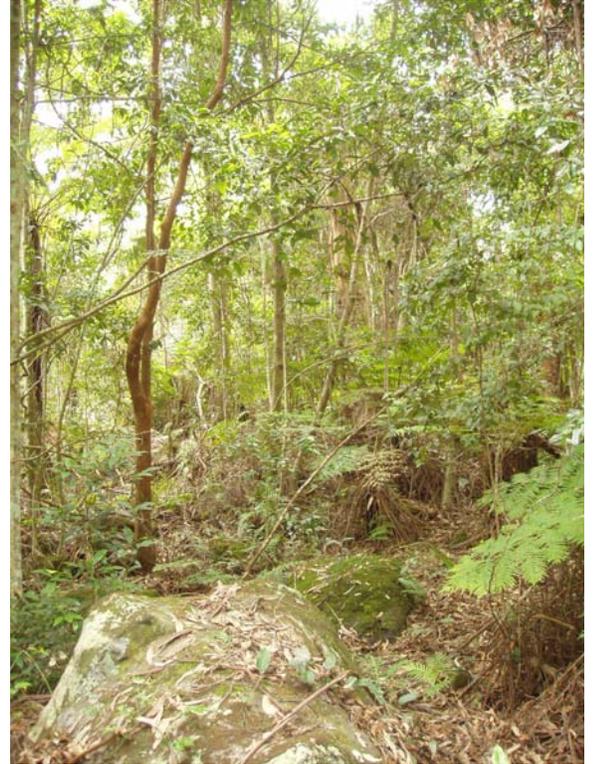
Our drive along [Bell's Line of Road](#) takes us past Cahills Lookout with a view down the Megalong Valley and [Govett's Leap](#) but alas the clouds are back.

This is a fruit growing area. We see peaches with nets over them, again just for insurance against hail damage. We pass through Kurrajong Heights which means shade tree.

Blue Mountains



68. Leura.



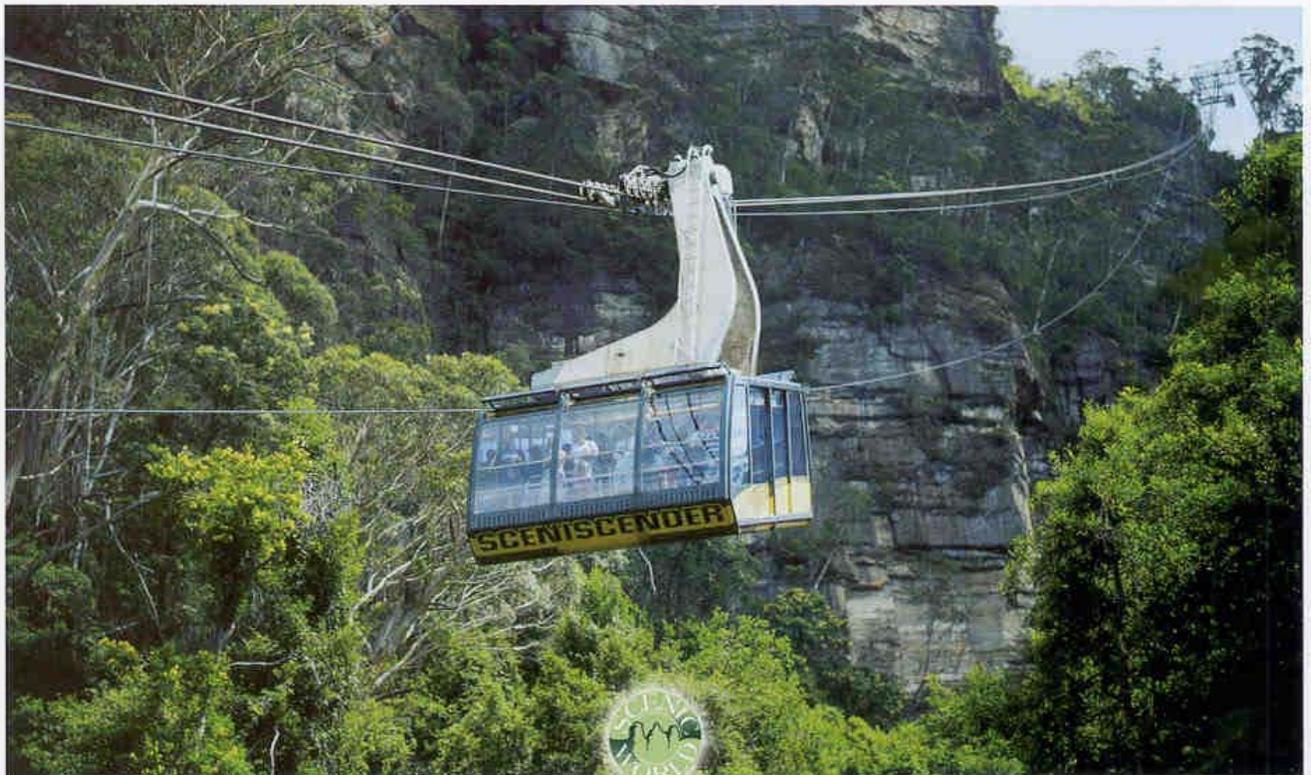
76. Rainforest.



77. Below the Three Sisters.



blue mountains
AUSTRALIA



blue mountains
AUSTRALIA



blue mountains
AUSTRALIA



The Legend

Long ago, a clever old man called Tyawan lived in the mountains. He had three daughters, Meenhi, Wimlah and Gunnedoo, and a magic shinbone that changed him into a lyrebird when he wished. When he went hunting, he would tell his daughters to stay on the cliff top, safe from Bunyip who lived in the valley.

One day Meenhi knocked a rock over the cliff. It crashed into the valley, waking Bunyip, who charged up the cliff toward the terrified girls. Tyawan could not reach them in time and so he changed them into rocks.

The Bunyip chased Tyawan, who changed his shape many times before changing into a lyrebird. But he dropped his magic shinbone when his arms changed into wings. Ever since, a lyrebird has scratched in the leaves, looking for the shinbone to change the girls back into human form.

The Three Sisters

We descend down winding Bellbird Hill to rolling hills and hobby farms.

Across the [Hawkesbury River](#) and into [Richmond](#), the streets lined with beautiful Crape Myrtle in full bloom.

On our way back into Sydney we stop at the [Koala Park Sanctuary](#). Jan tickles a Wombat and strokes a Koala. The koala is a marsupial with a pouch and sleep 90% of the time. We stroll around taking in the Wallabys and Kangaroos and learn there are over 60 varieties. The only difference being size. Cassowarys are the second largest bird in Australia and dangerous, so we keep a respectable distance.

We drove over the [Harbour Bridge](#) entering Sydney from the north. It was completed in 1932 at a cost of £10 million.

Most of our tour group are couples. Some are groups unto themselves like the four friends from Alberta or the seven merry widows from Summit, New Jersey. There are one or two loaners like Marti and Don. Marti has enjoyed today's excursion and asks if we have dinner plans. Now Jan and I are so organized at home that we have an unwritten rule on vacation, meals are an impulse. "I don't know where we are eating, but we plan on finding an open air restaurant along the harbour." We meet in the lobby and consult the concierge. My choice is a flop.

"No sir, I would not recommend them, just sea food and over priced. Try Woolfie's."

"Can you make a reservation?" He did.

We stroll along the 'boardwalk' towards The Rocks. I can't read the signs, but Marti announces "[there's Woolfie's.](#)" A row of five or six vintage sandstone buildings. Each one with adjoining courtyards in front, covered with tent like awnings. Seated we watch the light playing on the roof of the Opera House. A good meal. A few sprinkles of rain. But we mostly keep dry. I am glad of the sweater which I told Jan I would never need. I order fish, a Barramundi. Never heard of that before. Sort of off white, a little oily almost like salmon. Very good.

Koala Park Sanctuary.



85. Wombat. "I don't want to be here."



98. "Tie me kangaroo down..."



101. "Me Cassowary."

87. Koala. "Just feed me."



103. Scary 'roo.

Chapter 5 ~ Port Douglas, Wednesday 25th January.

Today we learn the procedure for Group Check In. This is the first of our several internal flights. We are going to Cairns. We collect our luggage from the belly of the bus and at Sue's command, form a line at the ticket counter. She hands us our boarding passes. We deposit our luggage for weighing, then take it to an X-ray machine where we waive goodbye to it. I'm pretty good at removing 'stuff' which the magnetometer will detect, so with everything out of my pockets I walk smartly through.

Bleep. "Take those shoes off sir."

"But, there's nothing metal in them." I walk confidently through. *Bleep.* Now what do I do, drop my pants? I remove my glasses. This time I make it. Now that's a first. By this time all my worldly goods are piled up in trays at the end of the X-ray machine.

Jan is having her own fun. I guess because she was with me, and I was creating a distraction, her purse was selected to be sniffed for bombs.

It is raining.

Ahead of time, Sue provided us with forms to fill out with seat requests. I like an aisle seat and Jan the next, but she warned us that Qantas can assign us anywhere. Our seats are a disaster. Up against the bulkhead. No leg room. After take off I look up front for spare seats of which there are plenty, so we move.

The flight to Cairns is 1,133 miles taking 2hr18min. Outside the temperature is -59°F.

I watch an interesting nature movie on [Cane Toads](#). These were deliberately introduced from Hawaii to Australia in 1935, to control scarab beetles, pests of sugar cane, but proved ineffective. Their venom is highly toxic to small creatures, but there have been no human deaths. They have spread throughout northern Queensland, the Northern Territories and are an ecological disaster, threatening [Goannas](#), Freshwater Crocodile, snakes, [Dingo](#) and birds for whom toads are a part of their diet.

In Cairns we board our bus for [Port Douglas](#) and follow the Cook Highway north along the coast. 'Captain Cook' was Australia's first tourist. In 1770 he passed the coastline heading north. His ship the 'Endeavour' struck the Great Barrier Reef and was beached at Cooktown for repairs.

This is sugar, mangrove and croc country. Sue cautions us. "Do *NOT* walk along river or lake banks. If you swim, be aware there are jelly fish that sting. Swim inside the fish net!"

Don't think I'm going in the ocean. Too many hazards!

Port Douglas.



110. Port Douglas.



119. Treetops, the Outback.



122. The Grounds at Treetops.

“Look, there’s a [sulphur crested cockatoo](#).” Actually a small flock. [Red Poinciana trees](#) are blooming. We pass a palm nursery. Some wild wallaby’s are browsing in a field. We follow the coast. There are lot’s of small sandy coves. It rains hard.

The [Radisson, Treetops](#) is built in a mini rainforest. Appropriate, because it’s raining, again! Nice ponds with lilies in bloom, and streams linking them. Mature trees, greenery everywhere. Within walking distance of [the beach](#), though we never get there.

We have the afternoon at leisure. We wear our ponchos. A bus takes us downtown Port Douglas. Not knowing where to get off we go all the way through town to the quay. Nice shops. We buy some cards and T-shirts, then wander back into town. I can’t figure out where to catch the bus, so ask at a tour agency. “Across the street.” Then I realize there are blue bus stops.

I insert the credit card style room key in the lock. Nothing. After a dozen tries I take it back to the front desk for replacement. Still nothing. Now I am getting upset. “I want maintenance, now.” Time for a martini at the bar. By the time we returned the maintenance guy was inside.

Using my key he opened the door several times. “What’s the trick?”

“Rub the card on your sleeve to dry it, then push hard.” Now it worked for me. Forlorn, all I could do was apologize, but another couple has the same problem.

Jan wrestles with the latch on the gate to the pool and bar. We are early for complimentary cocktails. “Look, lift here, it’s a trick.”

Dinner at The Outback Restaurant, a grill overlooking the pool at Radisson Treetops. We sit with four Canadians. Charlotte presents us with two hat pins making us honorary Calgarians.

Chapter 6 ~ The Barrier Reef, Thursday 26th January.

Breakfast at 7:00a.m. we board the bus at 9:15a.m.

Kathleen sees my camera and asks for help. “How do I save my pictures?” I examine her camera, an Olympus like mine. It is storing pictures in some kind of temporary memory. Perhaps a 20 picture capacity? “You need to put in a memory chip, do you have one?” She does, and I guess the camera was smart enough to copy everything over.

We talk to Bozo the Sulphur Crested Cockatoo. His residence is the handrail in the foyer, which he walks looking for favors. I try to scratch his head. Not sure he likes me, so I tuck my fingers in. He and Sue communicate like old friends.

It is Australia Day. The young man at the front desk has painted his face and body blue and yellow stripes. He recommends the Courthouse Hotel for evening dinner, but more of that later.

At the quay we board [Quick Silver](#) 8 a 90ft catamaran and sit aft. At 30 knots it takes a little over 1¼hrs to reach [Agincourt Reef](#).

There are lumpy white clouds down to the hill tops as we cruise north east from the shore. I study our companions. Toes come in all shapes and sizes. Some pretty.....

The pontoon where we moor is huge, perhaps 75x50 ft. Two levels with swim and dive platforms to one side. Seats, tables changing rooms and showers. A lower level below the water line is glass lined and affords a magnificent under water view of the reef.

We slip out of our clothes. It is overcast but warm.

One of the two submersibles is about to leave, so we scurry for seats. We climb down a ladder into a glass walled tube, five feet wide, seats across the width for two. A little claustrophobic. One man excuses himself, not comfortable with the space. We are glued to the window. The most incredible panorama unfolds as we steer between the coral outcrops. The many colored fish seem to stare back at us. This is their world.

We rent blue lycra body suits to ward off the stinging jelly fish. These contain a neurotoxin and can be quite serious.

We enjoy the buffet lunch of small octopus, mussels, salad, fruit, chicken and beef tips.

“Jan, we should have snorkeled before eating lunch.” Burp.

Everything is color coded, mask, flippers and snorkel. We get a selection for Jan, but she is not comfortable with duck feet. I have done this many times before. So all confident I walk off the iron grid deck and submerge. Seconds later I am gasping. My mask won't seal. I still do not know what was the problem, but three 'spits' later I was able to swim.

Port Douglas, Treetops



123. Lilly Pond at Treetops.



128. Sue and Bozo renewing a friendship.



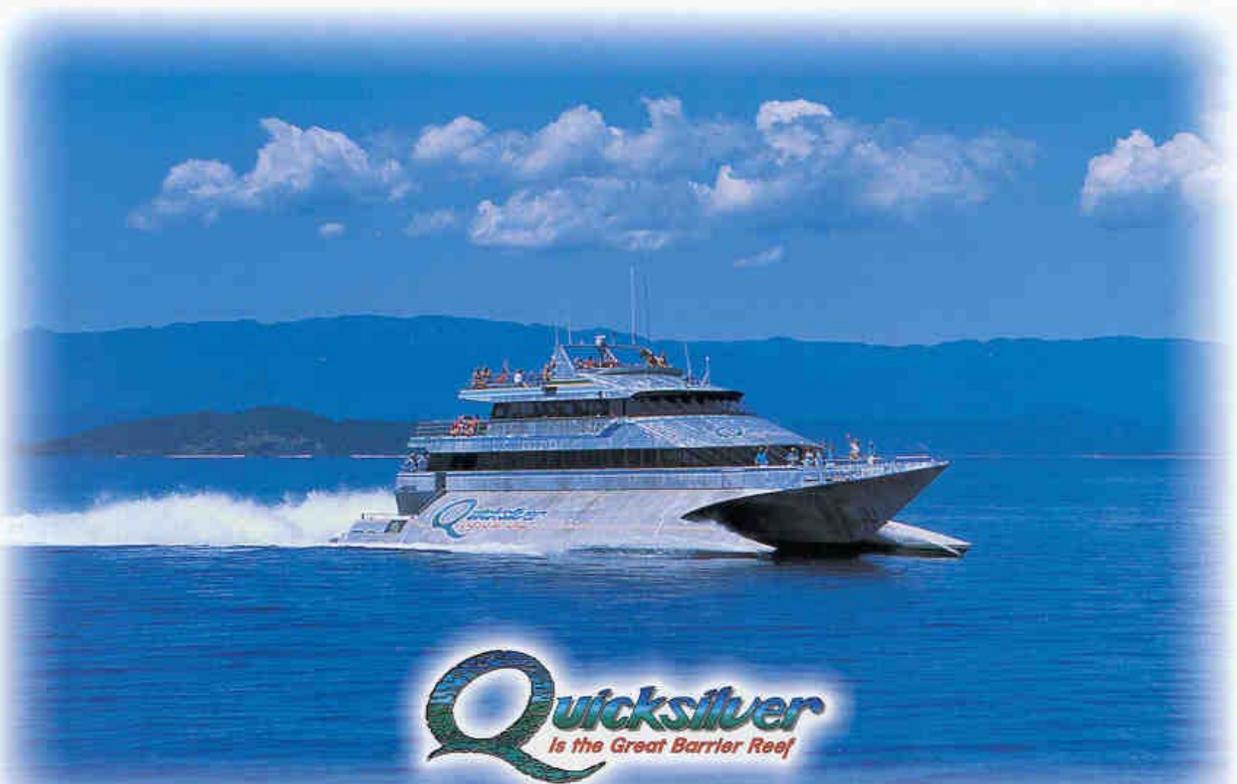
126. Bozo.



125. The Foyer and Bar at Treetops.



PORT DOUGLAS



Quicksilver
Is the Great Barrier Reef

Outer Barrier Reef • Port Douglas • Australia

To the Reef



130. Quicksilver.

136. The Pontoon.



202. Leaving the Pontoon.

184. Lycra Stinger Suits.



The Great Barrier Reef.

166. Corral.

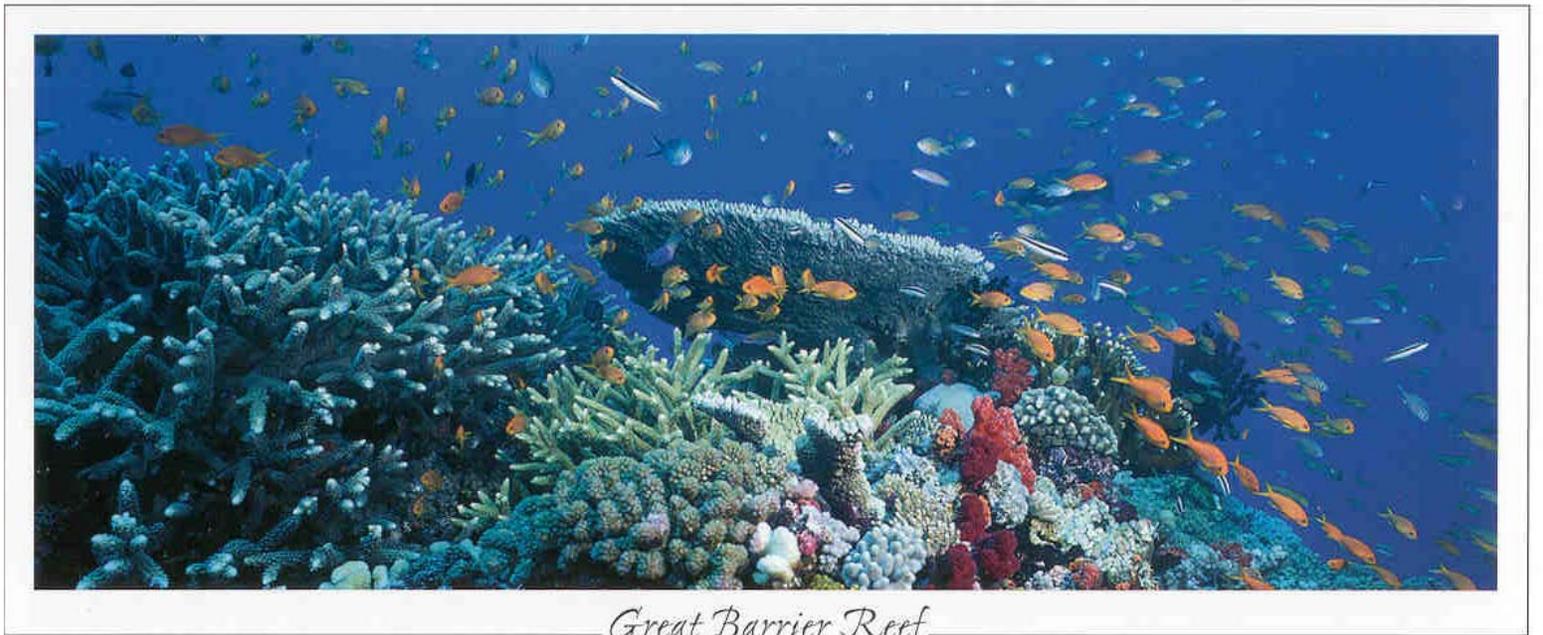


182. Catch me if you can.



191. Feed me.

179. Supper.



*Great Barrier Reef
- Australia -*

Slightly choppy, I was happy to stay within the learner barriers marked by blue ropes. And when the dreaded Asian tourists came by, I was glad to hang on while they kicked me with their fins. This had to be the [cleanest and most clear](#) water I have ever been swimming in.

It is fish feeding time. A young man has plastic boxes of fish pieces. He stands on one of the water level platforms, his feet a foot under water. He tosses out a piece of raw fish. Almost immediately two and three foot fish swim in to greet him. He drops pieces into open mouths. Known by name he introduces the grand daddy, all 80 pounds. And I was swimming with those. A lost swimmer paddles in to the arena, and is advised to leave immediately.

All too soon we commence our cruise back to Port Douglas.

There are two restaurants in the hotel, the Outback where we dined yesterday and one enclosed.

“Jan, I’m tired, lets just eat in.”

Around 7:00p.m. we dress and head for the restaurant. Passing Sue, she asks “Going down town? You should. It’s Australia Day. Should be lively.”

“No, too tired.” But the decision was made for us. The restaurant was closed.

“Please drop us at the closest stop to the Courthouse Hotel.”

“It’s right there, mate. On the corner.”

A young and noisy crowd are sitting at wooden tables which spill out onto the sidewalk, drinking beer. We were wanting something quieter, and spot [La Cucina](#) on the opposite corner with table cloths. Or should that be spelt cloth\$. We order and have a nice meal. Warm and no rain. Our Canadian friends walk up, inspect the menu, and walk on. We try to get their attention, but learn later they were looking for greener salads, or is it pastures?

“Bottle or tap water, sir?”

“Tap is fine.” I am amused when the water arrives in one of those fancy rubber stopper bottles sealed with a metal snap.

“It is just easier for us to bring it that way.”

We pack. Jan has lost her shorts. We unpack. Jan finds shorts behind suitcase. We re-pack. Such is life in a suitcase.

Chapter 7 ~ Breakfast with the Birds, Skyrail, Kuranda & Tjapukai, Friday 27th January.

Today we are going to have 'Breakfast with the Birds.' A short drive brings us to The [Rainforest Habitat](#), a wildlife sanctuary. Constructed in 1988, on eight acres, the sanctuary presents four different environments, featuring wetlands, rainforest, grasslands and woodland. There are 180 species and about 1600 animals.

We pass the crocodile pond, but they won't show themselves. Our guide takes us into an enclosure where Emu and Cassowary wander by. We learn that there are fewer than 1,500 of the latter left in the wild where they perform an important function, opening large seed pods to aid in germination. The Emu is fast, clocking speeds of 30mph.

The kangaroo are tame. Sue produces food and they eat from our hands. Various ducks squabble for the dropped pellets.

A kookaburra laughs at us and a graceful Brolga poses. A [Brolga](#) is a large grey crane. We follow the 300m long boardwalk spotting various lake birds. A lorikeet is fighting for orange juice. The birds have feeding stations and set times to eat. A [cormorant](#) follows us along the bank hoping to be fed. "That is not milk, it is white nectar."

Breakfast at last. A nice buffet. "Yes I will have Champagne in my orange juice." I put my plate down to make space on the table and almost lose it to a long necked bird who is reaching for it. "Shoo!"

We leave and continue our journey along the coast toward Cairns. Our driver points out a tree. "That is known as a dead dog gum tree." Pause..... "It has no bark." Ugh! If only it were sunny, Palm Cove has a beautiful beach, and there is '[Scout Hat Island](#).'

Sue does a great job keeping us entertained on the bus. She reads a poem by Rupert McCall titled "[Green and Gold Malaria](#)." A story of Aussie pride. And then it's pink sheet time.

Now for our ride in a cable car over the [Rainforest](#). Conceived in 1987, it took seven years of planning to get environmental permits and permission to proceed, but only fifteen months to build. No roads were built and helicopters were used extensively during construction of the 32 towers. There are three separate cable systems separated by intermediate stations, in all almost 4¾ miles.

We board at the [Caravonica](#) terminal. The cars are large and can seat six, we share the first leg with Jean Paul & Nicole. This is fantastic. The tallest tower is 133ft. We are high above the rainforest canopy. If you look carefully, there are birds to be seen. "There's a white cockatoo."

At Red Peak Station we leave the gondola and follow a boardwalk into the Rain Forest.

Rain Forest Habitat



208. Baby Wallaby.



211. Water hole.



215. My Friend and I.



214. Posing Brolga.

Breakfast with the Birds.



229. Friend.



218. Roo says Hi.



233. Breakfast.

Skyrail.



234. Over the Tree Tops.

251. A view down.



253. Barron's Falls.



252. River.



SKYRAIL
CAIRNS AUSTRALIA

The second leg takes us over the mountains tops to Barron Falls Station. A walk along the cliffs affords some spectacular views of the Falls. The last leg takes us down to Kuranda Terminal. As the gondola enters the terminal, our photo is taken. We purchase the tourist keepsake. I look surprised!

[Kuranda](#) is a small town which probably only owes its existence to us tourists. Lots of touristy and boutique stores. We need lunch. I want a beer. We duck in and out of a few shops.

“No, I don’t want a didgeridoo. It just goes brr... grr... hrr...”

We spot an opening in the stores. The Kuranda Rainforest View Restaurant is what we need. We sit on the balcony and enjoy our sandwiches. Not too much time.

Walking back we spot an interesting store playing Ozzie music. I want that CD. We chat with the manager. An ex-brit. Hurry for the bus. We move on and buy T-shirts at a couple more shops.

Back at the bus. “Jan, where are my glasses.”

“I don’t have them. Are they at the last store?”

“Which one.” I panic. Only about a quarter mile, but so many people. Move over tourists, I’m coming through.

“*Hello.* I knew you’d be back.” Said the manager. Well I was not last on the bus.

Sue reckons we are going ‘Tropo.’

We board the Kuranda Scenic Railway which takes us through the rain into Cairns, about 1½ hrs. To our surprise we are served champagne. Not bad. “Can I sleep?”

Cairns is a town of about 130,000 with Queensland style homes, 16° South of the Equator, 600 miles north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It has a large fleet of shrimp boats. Its main industries are tourism and sugar cane production.

We alternate between sun, rain and thunder. Spider lilies line the road. The Shangri-La Hotel has a beautiful inner courtyard with gardens and pool.

“If it were not raining I would tell you to cross the courtyard, the shortest route to your room, but I suggest you follow the corridors.”

We hike. “The room key does not work, *again!*”

“You are using the safe key....”



Skyrail

Kuranda Scenic Railway.



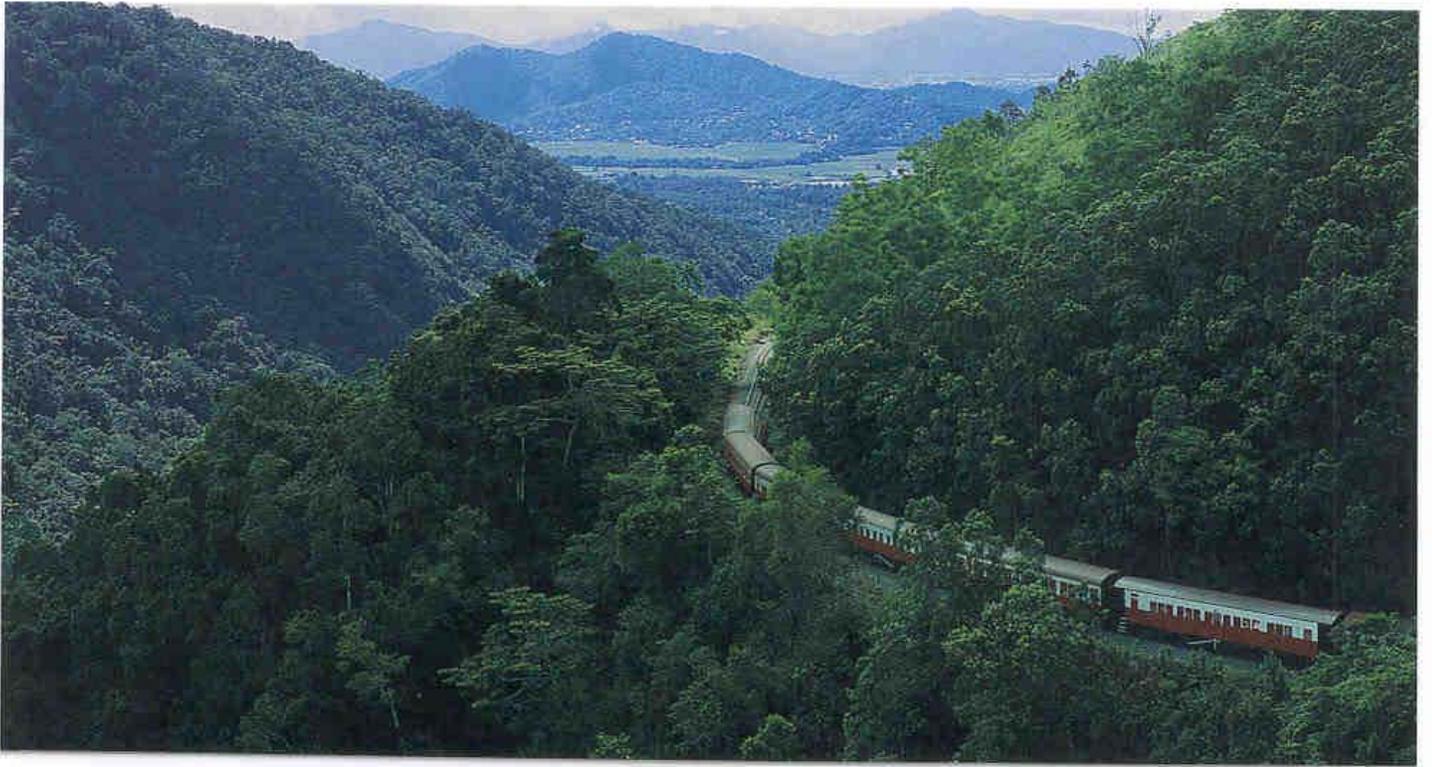
258. Aboard the Kuranda Scenic Railway.



260. Redlynch.



266. Bridge at Stony Creek Falls.



KURANDA SCENIC RAILWAY
AUSTRALIA

Our driver delivered our luggage early, which is already in our room. A very nice touch. I shower and flood the floor.

The [Tjapukai](#) show starts at 7:00pm, so we leave a few minutes before. We stand in a large open space and are introduced to characters from the [Dream Time](#). The Aborigine concept of creation. Six male dancers enter and we are treated to the creation of fire. Several men rub a burning stick and [kindle a fire](#). We troop outside and one throws a spear topped with the flame, across the stream.

The buffet dinner was OK, but not great.

The show, by the same six slightly over weight male dancers in loin cloths, told stories in mime of hunting and gathering then with songs and chants. Again, OK, but it would have been nice to see some female participation.

Australian TV is not inspiring. I check out Guest Net, a TV version of the internet. When I tried to send an E-mail to John, I reached the Honeywell Corporate home page. At the front desk I got the \$5.50 charge removed from my bill.

Tjapukai



282. Dancers.

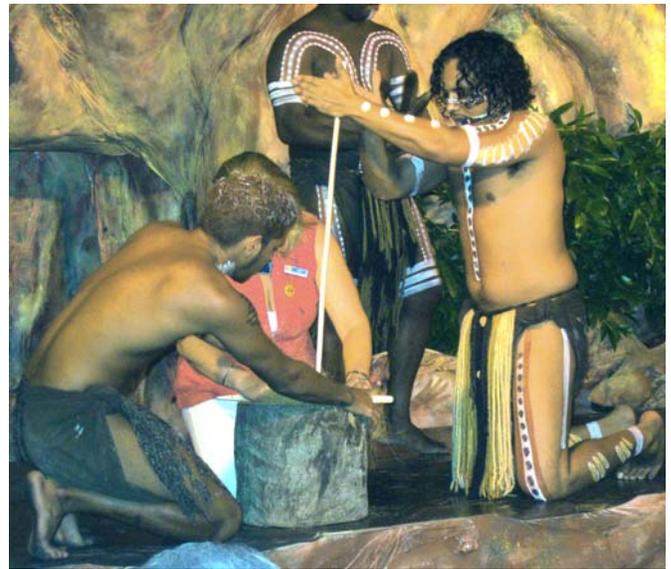


274. Tap Sticks & Didgeridoo.

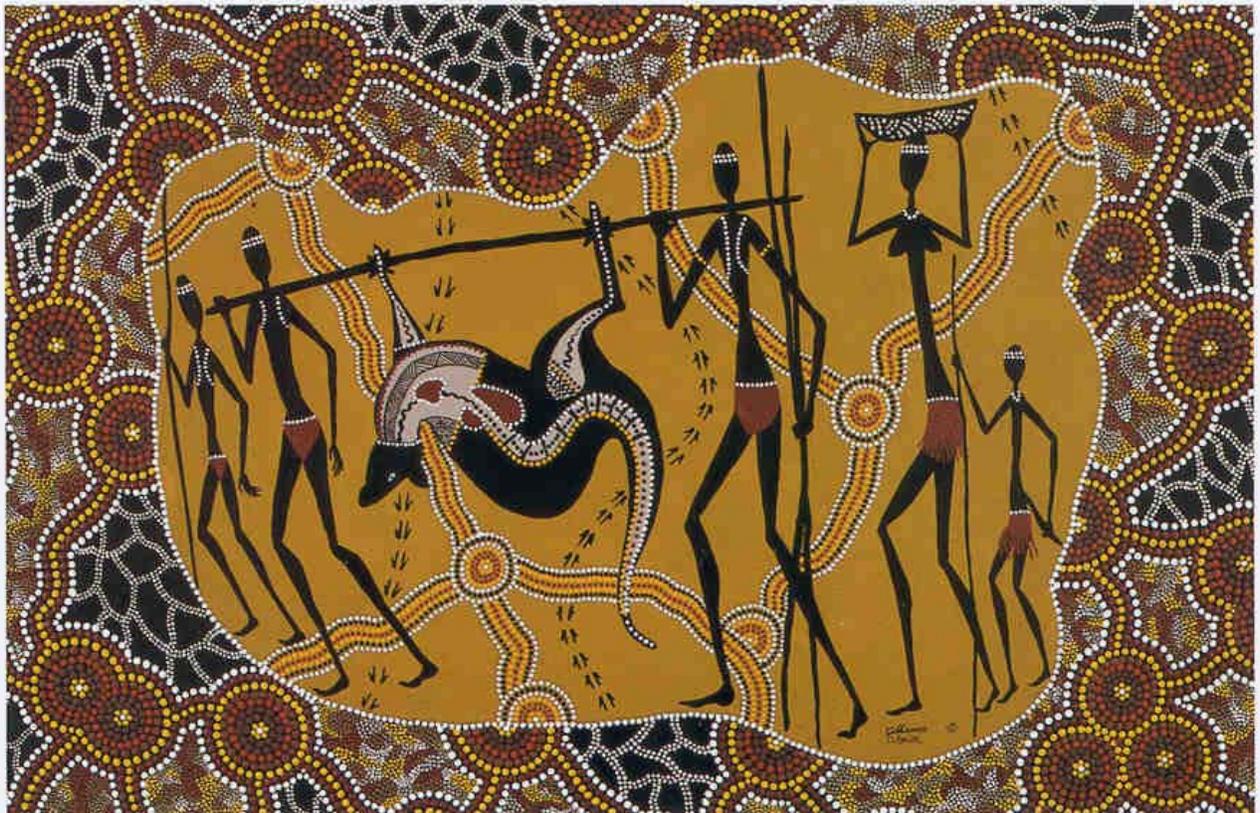


279. Making Fire.

277. And fire came.



271. A Dreamtime Story.



Aboriginal Australia

Chapter 8 ~ Cairns and the Flight to Darwin, Saturday 28th January.

Our morning is at leisure, but we are up at 7:15 am and breakfast on the deck overlooking the marina. The day is overcast. We take time to admire the tropical shrubs around the Shangri-La before starting our hike up the boardwalk.

We met Marti, she had started out an hour earlier and was already returning to cool off. We walk about a mile and watch an emergency helicopter land on the grass outside a hospital. Unfortunately this is not an exercise. A flock of pelicans are drifting lazily in the bay and ignore us. Tiny red fish wiggle like eels amongst the weed. Slightly large black ones scoot across the surface. Several men are throwing [cast nets](#) for bait.

We walk about a mile before turning back. Everything is packed ready for our flight, so we swim in the pool and get a little sun. Actually quite a lot. That evening my forehead demanded face cream.

“Where can we eat lunch overlooking the marina?”

“Try the [Café Mondo](#).” We cross the street and snake around a new block of condos. The Café looks OK so we seat ourselves outside, but under an overhang. We order from the menu at the bar, and are rewarded with a numbered card stuck atop a metal base like a flag. Jan dines on chicken strips and fried rice. I have Indonesian beef with rice and cucumber yogurt. Different.

We watch the clouds roll in over the hills and soon it is pouring with rain. Under the overhang we stay dry, but how are we going to get back to the hotel? We don't want to fly in wet clothes. The monsoon slackens and we walk briskly back to Shangri-La. We were lucky. No sooner were we back than ‘the wet’ started again.

Sue tells us we are going to the Northern Territory. Which stands for “Not today, not tomorrow, not Tuesday....” With a population of only 200,000.

Continuing our linguistic education, she asks if we understand “Put a Darwin stubby in your [Esky](#) in the [tinny](#) and catch a Barramundi.” Translated this means ‘put a six pack of beer in the cooler in your aluminum boat and go fishing.’

Jan, “I can't fasten this seat belt.”

“You can't have put that much weight on.” It is wrapped around the arm rest.

The flight is bumpy. Australia has five time zones, some only one half hour different. As we touch down in [Darwin](#) we advance our watches ½hr. Although named after Charles Darwin, he never visited the city.

The [Saville Park](#) provides a suite with kitchen, dining and sitting area, bedroom with king size bed and a washer and dryer. Oh bliss. We dry our rain damp clothes.

Shangri-La Cairns



285. Swim time.



288. Esplanade.



290. Shangri-La.



291. Marti & Jan.



294. Flowers in the Grounds.



299. Our Walk Along the Shore.

Chapter 9 ~ Darwin, Kakadu, Jumping Crocs, Nourlangie and Jabiru, Sunday 29th January.

I photograph a red dawn from our seventh floor window. It is windy, humid and warm. I finally found a computer kiosk and sent my first E-mail home. After our buffet breakfast, our driver Mooka, took us on a tour around town. Ten weeks after Pearl Harbor, in February 1942, two bad air raids destroyed much of Darwin Harbor. In 1974, the city was severely damaged by cyclone Traci.

Now the town is growing fast. A new wharf is being built for cruise ships.

Leaving the town, we pass the man made [Lake Alexander](#) completed in 1991 as a recreational facility. We are cautioned not to walk along the banks of any waterway in the Northern Territory, crocodiles can lurk anywhere. The gestation period is 6wks, typically 50 eggs are laid, incubation is 175 days. Crocs grow 3ft/yr for two years then about 1in/yr year thereafter.

Although largely wet, forest fires can strike and we notice trees along the road at two levels. Stripped of lower branches the tall ones have re-grown at the top. The short ones are new growth after the fire. The eucalypts have black bark around the trunk at the base but a smooth white top.

Mangos and bananas are grown here. We pass orchards and plantations. The locals may have one or two mangos in their garden and can earn up to \$300 a tree when transient workers come in to pick.

In 1818 Philip King named the river system "Alligator." The names have stuck but there are no 'gators here only crocs.

We stop briefly at the '[Window on the Wetlands](#)' Visitor Centre. The [Adelaide River](#) floods a vast area of grasslands which stretch for miles in all directions.

After spraying with insect repellent. We board our boat for the [Jumping Croc Cruise](#) and sit on deck under an awning. The insects are nowhere near as bad as we were led to believe. We have them much worse in Illinois.

The river is not very wide at this time of year. Somewhat muddy and lined with short trees and vegetation. Our lady navigator and narrator maneuvers us mid stream. "Look over the side." A dark shadow is stalking the boat. Each croc has it's own territory, is known to the crew and named. A jut out along the railing allows our hunter to dangle a pork chop from a rod and string. The shadow rises out of the water, a huge croc snaps at the chop, but our 'hunter' teases. The croc, now several feet out of the water, is allowed his snack and swims triumphantly back to the bank.

This dance is repeated several times. The oldest croc is 80 years and 18½ft. Crocs have binocular color vision, so wearing a red life jacket would not be good. Hunted to near

Darwin Coast



312. Coast Near Darwin.



315. East Point Reserve.



316. Our Trusty Steed,
the Stretch Mercedes.

extinction, but now protected, it is estimated there are 75,000 in the wild. There have been 66 attacks and 20 fatalities. We see a flattened patch of grass with a mound of rotting vegetation, a typical nesting site for a female crocodile.

An eagle takes his turn to grab a pork chop and later several kites dive for fish.

My video camera has died from the moisture and will not record until I can dry it out.

This is cattle country. The predominant breed a cross between Brahman and Braford suited to the tropics. The cattle stations are huge but there is little other habitation.

We stop at the Bark Hut Roadhouse for lunch, a typical Australian bar/café/gas station/souvenir shop. Last night they held a B&S ball, *Bachelor and Spinsters Ball*, a social event held in the outback for young people, typically a weekend of music, dancing, and drinking. Guests normally wear formal evening attire, but sleep in tents or in their vehicles. The police had set up roadblocks, and not everyone had made it home. Rather than give out tickets, the police turn anyone back who fails a breathalyzer test. The alcohol limit is .05ml/L. A couple of young men were still sobering up.

[Kakadu National Park](#) is larger than New Jersey. Red earth, lush green grass sprinkled with eucalypt trees, [screw pine](#) and termite mounds. The aborigine pound and wash the fruit from screw pine to remove toxins, then bake to make an unleavened bread. Not all [termites](#) are destructive to homes. These are the clean up brigade.

We are headed for [Jabiru](#), population 600, established on aboriginal land as a uranium mining town.

Prior to the arrival of the white man, the aborigine spoke about 250 non written languages, but few are now in use. They account for about 1.5% of Australia's 20 million population, but moving frequently, are difficult to count. Education and medical care are provided, but they live as a separate shy and quiet population, not integrated into modern society. Their names are complex derived from Father/Kinship/Skin type (mother's maiden name). Tourists are not welcome. We are warned not to photograph or enter their lands, which are a restricted area. School is mandatory from 5-10 years of age. Their tribal justice is very harsh, based on the concept of payback. (Analogous to the Old Testament concept, *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*.) A sentence might be a spear in the leg. Worse yet, a bad guy can be declared 'living dead'. In which case they are banished from the society. No one talks to them or looks at them. Some felons prefer Australian (White) justice and then do not return to their Aboriginal roots.

The Aborigine are represented in both Australia's lower and upper houses.

Their society is based upon spiritual teachings and laws passed along at levels of initiation. This knowledge is closed to us. [Dreamtime](#) is their version of creation. Most of their sacred sites and drawings are off limits, but we are allowed to visit [Nourlangie Rock](#).

Jumping Crocs.



317. Window on the Wetlands.



324. The Adelaide River is Croc Country.



340. Crocodile Snack.



353. Dental Hygiene?



358. Croc Food.

A short drive and stiff climb. I should have worn better shoes. We admire the drawings hidden in recessed rock caves and learn something of the styles used, then climb to the Gunwarddehwardde Lookout for a view of the cliffs.

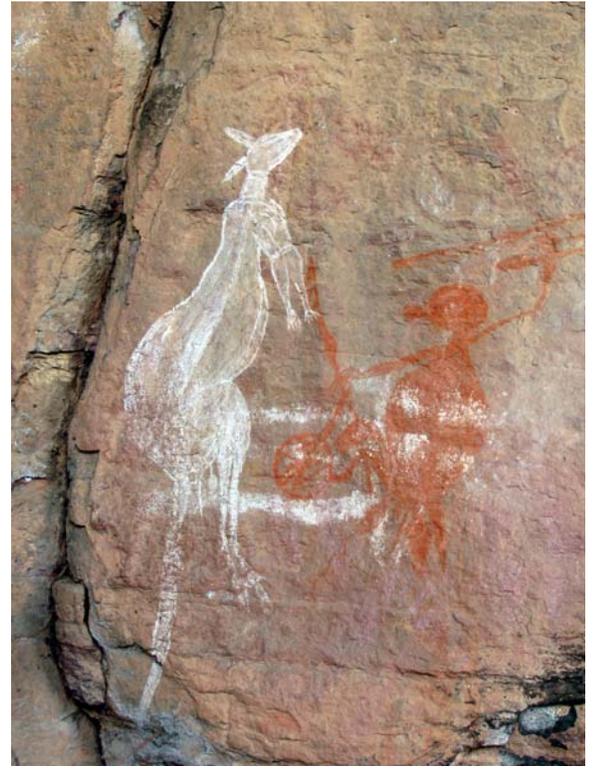
We check in to the [Gagudju Crocodile Holiday Inn](#). Literally built to look like one from the air.

After dinner we are advised that there will be no electricity after midnight until 4:00am due to scheduled maintenance. No problem, we have our battery alarm clock.

Nourlangie Rock



370. Cave at Nourlangie Rock.

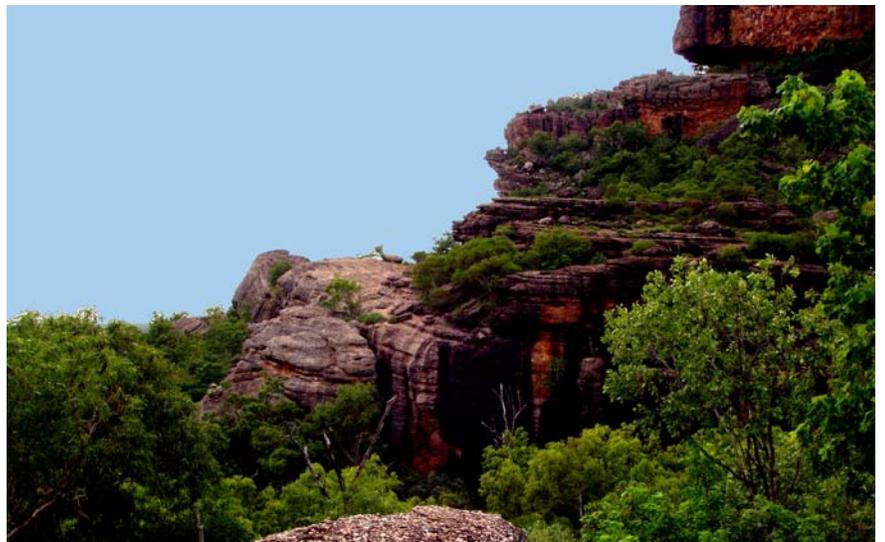


371. Aborigine Drawings.



382. Mythological Figures Including Lightning Man.

385. View from Gunwarddehwarde Lookout.





Kakadu Northern Territory Australia



GAGUDJU CROCODILE HOLIDAY INN
KAKADU NATIONAL PARK · NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Chapter 10 ~ Bowali Visitor Centre, Drive to Darwin, Flight to Alice Springs.
Monday, January 30th.**

Faced with an early departure, we had to be up before dawn. It was interesting packing in the dark. Glad we did most last night. “No, I don’t expect a hot breakfast.” But I was wrong. The hotel staff provided flashlights and candles for the breakfast prepared with propane gas. “Well done!” I need the coffee. Australian coffee is *very* good. The electricity came back on just as we left.

There are plenty of homes in Jabiru and the town was planned expecting a larger population. The houses have no gutters, the rain would overwhelm them.

There are flocks of [Corellas](#) (cockatoo.) Last week they hauled a crocodile off the golf course.

Residents are allowed dogs but not cats and visitors may not bring in any pets. Cats have killed too much of the wild life in the past. Everyone uses four wheel drives equipped with a snorkel so the engine can breath under water.

At the [Bowali Visitor Centre](#) we stand in a circle holding grab bars, and watch a slide show about the flora and fauna of the park. Images are projected on eight screens simultaneously, each a different picture, size and distance from us. Interesting technique. We don’t have time to watch all the show, so go on to browse the gift shops, stroll the boardwalks, and look at the interpretation of aboriginal life.

We drive on toward Darwin. Our education continues. Driving age is 16, drinking age is 18, voting age is 18. If you do not vote there is a \$50 fine. Drivers must display an [L] sign as a learner for 6 months, then for 1 year [P] for Provisional. You start with 12 points and for every moving violation loose 2 or more. If down to zero you loose your license for 2 years. All vehicles must pass a roadworthiness check.

The minimum hourly wage is \$12.45AU at age 21, about \$10US.

It’s a long journey and Sue is keeping us occupied. We stop at the Bark Hut again. It has not improved. Muffin and tea for our mid-morning break.

These are huge ‘[magnetic termite mounds](#). Apparently oriented north to south. Worth a picture or two. They grow an inch or so each year. These must be 25ft tall.

The clouds are lumpy with sun breaking through. No rain. We watch a film in the bus on Kakadu and cross the Adelaide River. We overtake a Road Train. Sue offers us ‘Minties and Sherbert Lemon’ sweets (candies)

My video camera is stuck in X-ray and shuttles back and forth three times. They re-boot the system. The flight to Alice is 1hr 40min on a Qantas 737. We have a snack of Anzac cookies, wheat, oats, coconut, golden syrup and wattle seed. The plane is ½ full.

It is dry. Acres of grass dotted with shrubby green trees. On either side is a red escarpment, the Mc Donald Ranges. We drive through a gap. Wild camels off to our right. Beautiful lumpy white clouds. Alice is a town of 27,000 people.

Our driver. “Off to our right is the American Communications Base which does not exist! It employs 2,000 Americans on a two year rotation. You did not hear this.”

We cross the wide [Todd River](#) into Alice Springs. That’s a *river*, but it’s dry sand? OK it’s sometimes a river. Just dig down for moisture. There is an annual dry boat race called [Henley on Todd](#).

We ascend [Anzac Hill](#), a red granite mound with mica chips, to look out over Alice. No tall buildings, no haze, about 114°F, desert. It looks like Tucson. Jan is disappointed. I knew what to expect. This is no longer “A Town Like Alice” from the 1950’s. Cole’s has a mural painted on its rear wall depicting the history of Alice. There’s a K-mart and Pizza Hut. It is a service town for all the outlying territory.

We check in to the Alice Springs Resort. I make up for missing the morning shower. No second face cloth. The water is scalding hot.

Over the bridge and around a couple of blocks we walk looking at tourist shops. It is 114°F.

The gang met up in the bar. They actually knew how to make Jan’s Port and Lemon. We had a waited meal. The service was pretty laid back, but the food was excellent. My lamb cutlet was like fillet minion.

Drive to Darwin



395. Outback Wheels.

392. The Bark Hut.

393. Inside the Bark Hut.



397. 25 ft Termite Mound.



399. The Grassland.

Alice Springs



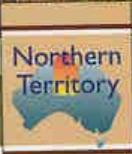
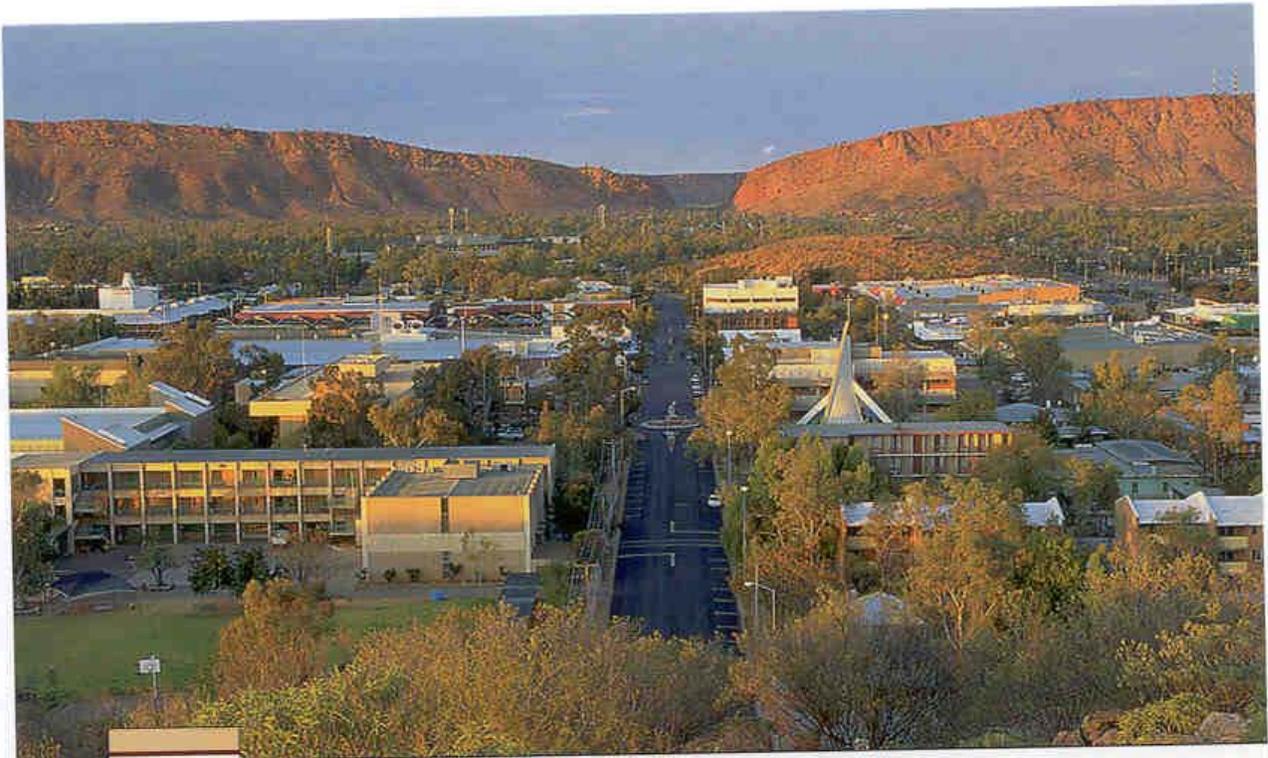
401. Alice from Anzac.



405. Alice Springs Resort.



407. Todd River.



ALICE SPRINGS

Chapter 11 ~ Flying Doctor, Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Tuesday January 31st

A shame, Marti's dawn balloon ride was cancelled due to wind.

The seven merry widows swap rooms each night to share partners, but this has the front desk totally confused by their drink bills. They get a lecture about charging.

Slow down, walk slow, it's 110°F.

At the [Royal Flying Doctor](#) base we watch an introductory film. In 1918, during his missionary work, the Rev. John Flynn was conscious of the terrible isolation endured by inland people and published an article proposing the use of radio and airplanes for ambulance work. However it was not until 1928 that the service became operational. After the film we move to the dispatch room. We sit on benches and stare through a glass partition watching the operator actually plan a code 2 evacuation. Only a doctor can authorize an evacuation.

The operator sits at a consol with radio and computer equipment all round. On the back wall is a status board and large map of central Australia showing the dispatch center in the middle. Airfields are marked with color coded disks to indicate their status; grass, tarmac etc.

In the museum we see one of the original pedal powered radios developed by Alfred Traeger in 1929.

The service now uses 39 aircraft in 16 locations and besides ambulance service, provide scheduled clinics. The single engine Pilatus aircraft are Swiss built, cost \$6 million and have a 10 year life. Their capacity is 7 sitting or 2 laying and 4 sitting, plus staff.

Leaving Alice we drive in the stretch Mercedes bus through Heavitree Gap along the Stuart Highway.

Wild cattle and camels are a hazard. This is Camel Country. To be precise, Dromedaries. The first camel in Australia was imported from the Canary Islands in 1840. The next major group of 24 camels came out in 1860 for the ill-fated Bourke and Wills expedition. An estimated 10,000 to 12,000 camels, were imported between 1860 and 1907, and used as draft and riding animals by people pioneering the dry interior. At Stuarts Creek we stop for morning tea and Jan a camel ride. Two people on each. Camels drop their front legs first, so when crouching down, Jan was almost catapulted off.

Sue is keeping our minds and bodies occupied. We listen to and sing along Waltzing Matilda. We cross the dry Finke River. We are entering Pastoral Lease lands. Time for Ozzie aerobics. Sue teaches us a children's song which we then act out with flapping arms and hands. "*Home Among the Gum Trees*"

If we continued, we would eventually reach Adelaide. We turn west and stop at Mount Ebenezer, another roadhouse, for pie and chips.

On Route to Yulara



415. Flying Doctor, Early Peddle radio.



417. Goodbye Jan.....



418. The Desert Goes By.



422. Mount Connor.

Except for the roadhouse, we have not seen any sign of life for many miles. Spinifex grass dominates.

I knew about Ayers Rock, but I did not know there are three major rock formations in this area. To our left, south, is Mount Connor.

On to Curtin Springs. This is Aborigine land, dry, red and peppered with scrub. We pass a Road Train.

We arrive in the hotel complex of Yulara and stop at [Sails in the Desert](#) long enough to unload our bags and grab an ice cream. Only two bug bites. Sails is one of several hotels in the [Ayers Rock Resort](#) a relatively new complex.

We head for [Kata Tjuta](#), meaning many heads, otherwise known as the Olgas, after Queen Olga.

The flying insects are not as bad as predicted, but we spray anyway. There is no rainy season. It just rains when conditions are right. Trouble is they are right now.

“Jan, where are those ponchos?”

“In the suitcases, back at the hotel.” Oh, well.

We are walking up a path on red aggregate and pebbles which converges between two huge rocks into a gorge. Each a head of the Olga. The base rock is gray, but the surface is stained red by iron oxide. It is now raining hard. Suddenly water begins to gush from holes the huge rock. It looks like a giant pepper pot. Sue is ecstatic. I'm just *wet*. In ten years she has never seen this.

A tiny stream has become a small torrent. “Jump Jan.” The canyon walls are closing in. We don't go to the end. It has stopped raining. The water spouts instantly disappear. Back at the coach Don strips off his T-shirt amid applause and wrings out the water. Termites are stimulated by the moisture and are flying to mate.

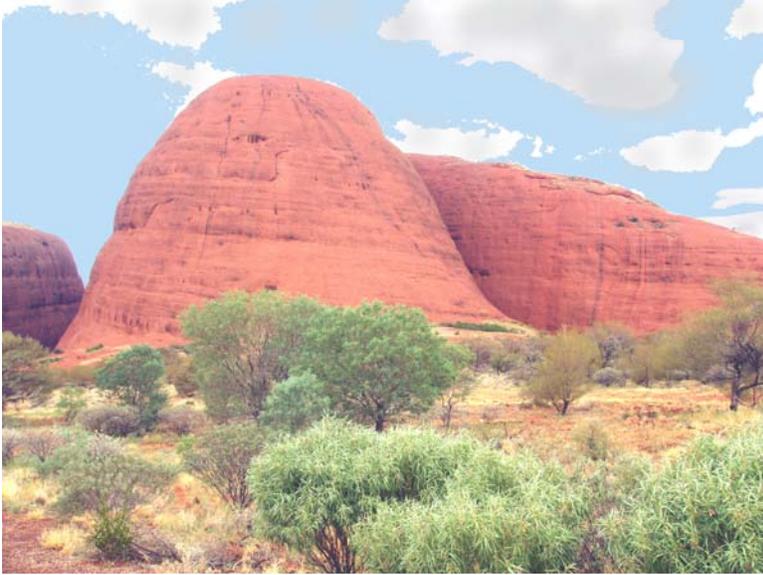
We are soggy but warm.

We listen to songs “*When it rains on the Olgas*” and “*Big Red Rock*.”

Uluru sort of grows out of the desert floor. With time to spare, we take a spin around ‘*the Rock*.’ A brilliant red monolith.

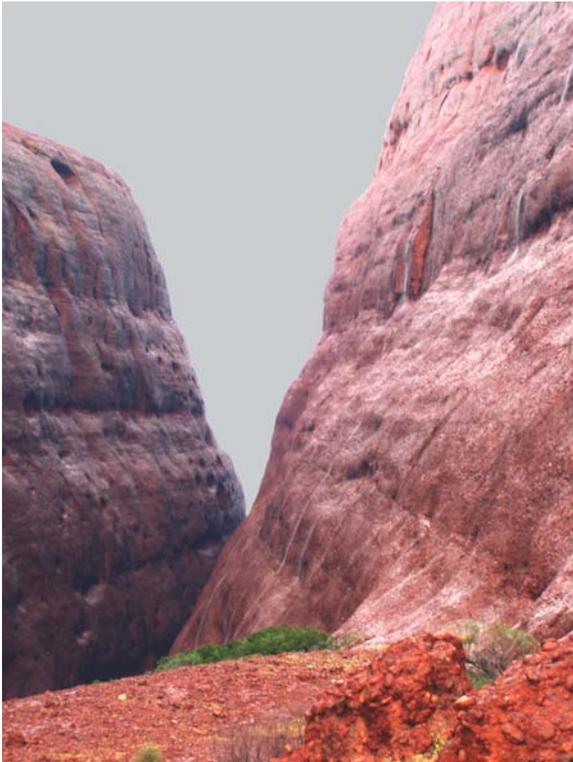
The climb up Ayres rock is ridiculous. A chain ‘handrail’ has been installed. In my teens I rock climbed. There is no way I would attempt the ascent of Ayres Rock without boots, a buddy and ropes. Many people have died climbing.

Kata Tjuta, the Olgas



423. Kata Tjuta Smiling.

426. The Olgas Crying.



431. Walpa Gorge.



432. Foot of the Olgas.

Back in our room at last, we get out of wet clothes. It was very nice to have our luggage waiting.

“Where shall we eat?” This is a large hotel complex and village.

“Let’s follow the crowd.” Our tour group heads for Geckos. The food is good, the service slow. But we are used to that, and anyway, what else would we do.

“Marti, is that a photo flash, or lightning?” After a few more, we agree, lightning! It is pouring. We wait for the rain to subside and then scamper back to our hotel. The glazed quarry tile is like glass.

Chapter 12 ~ Uluru, Wednesday 1st February

The driver says it's soggy at Uluru. Alice got more rain last night than in the previous five years.

We hold our park entry tickets up to the window.

Ayers Rock was named for the Premier of South Australia, Sir Henry Ayers. The Rock is arkose, a coarse-grained sandstone rich in feldspar. 5.6 miles around the base, it's top 1,114 feet above the desert is 2,845 feet above sea level. The layers of rock are tilted at almost 90° and about 3.75 miles deep. There are [interesting theories](#) about its formation. The rock is rich in [Aborigine history](#).

We could have climbed or walked around the base at dawn, but instead chose to take the [Mala walk](#) and [Mutitjulu walk](#) which ends at the only permanent water hole, tranquil and green. We see several caves with rock paintings believed to be used as a teaching aid. The paintings are in several styles, dot art and X-ray, and cover a long period of time. Subject to weathering, one has been re-touched. These we are allowed to photograph, but signs to our left forbid us to photograph a sacred site.

A bush fire raced through this area two months ago, but already the grass is regenerating.

The aborigine knew how to use many natural materials. Sue shows us a 'spear bush' and acacia seed from which a glue is made. The bark of bloodwood trees can be made into bowls.

After driving around the base we stop at the [Cultural Center](#), then back to Sails.

We were going to have lunch at Geico's, but there are no light meals, so we cross the courtyard to the Red Rock Kitchen. Two burgers, 2 cokes, one fries, about \$22. We ate outside. Lunch with the flies!

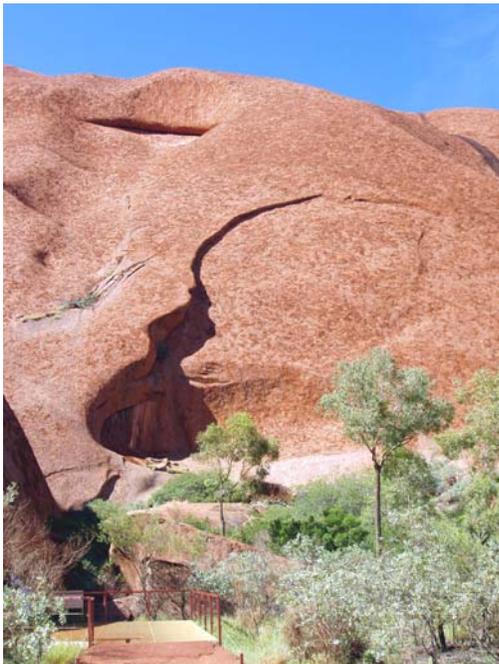
The pool was nice. We were lazy. Then packed for the Ghan.

The locals are afraid our bus might get stuck in soft ground, so our planned sunset dinner in the desert is cancelled. A shame, I never did get to see the southern cross. The seafood buffet put on in its place is superb, I love those sad prawns with big black eyes. Then there were mussels, clams, smoked fish, lamb beef and ham.

Uluru ~ Central Australia



496. The Classic Ayres



483. Another View.



445. Close up of Uluru.



488. No Flies on These Ladies.



495.



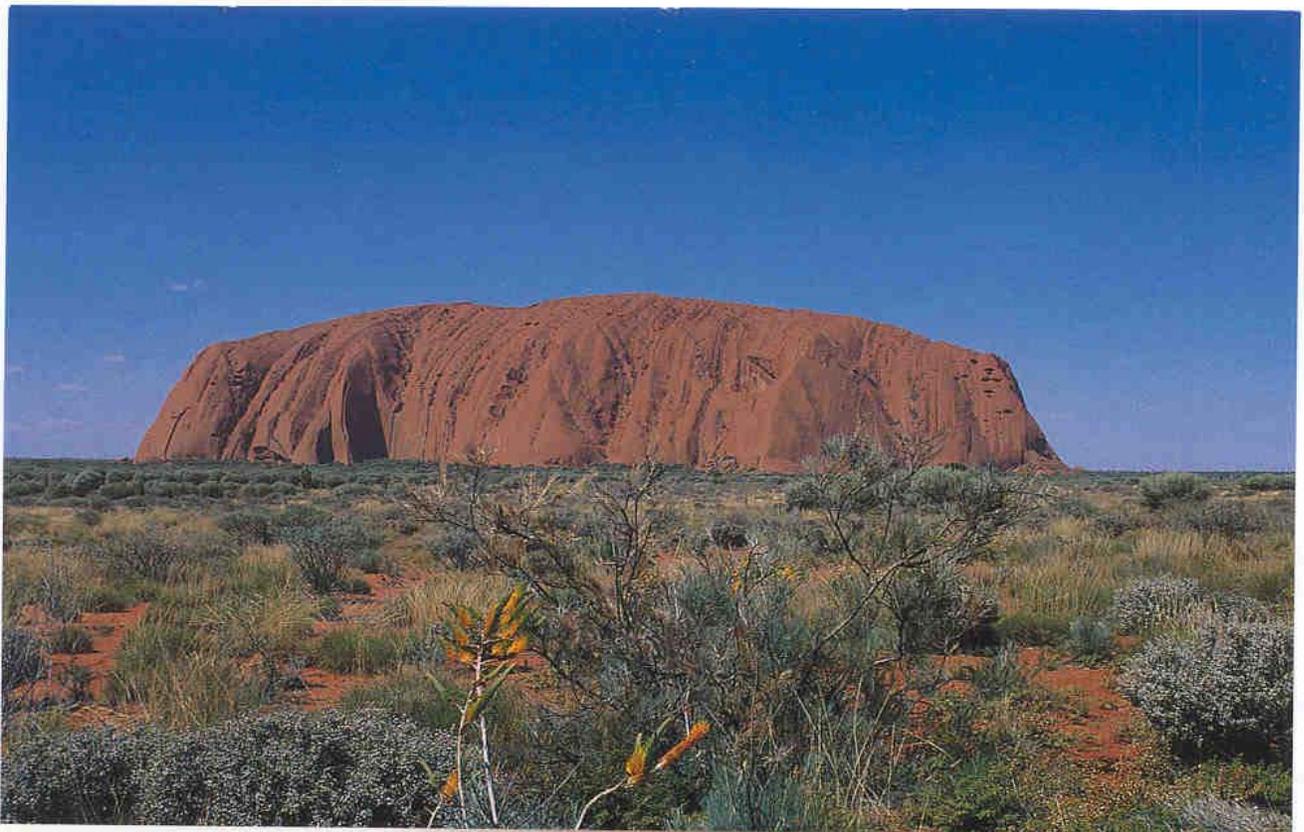
474.



502. Meanwhile, back at the Bar.



Mount Connor Northern Territory Australia



Uluru Central Australia.



Chapter 13 ~ Drive to Alice, The Ghan, Thursday 2nd February.

Sue reminds us “This is not a holiday, it’s a tour.”

We stop at another roadhouse Eridunda. There’s a lonesome camel and we slow for half a dozen loose cows. The bush is never ending. The sun is bright, the sky filled with streaky white clouds like rashers of bacon. We watch a film ‘*Nature of Australia, Portrait of a Continent.*’

Sue hands out single sheets of newspaper for a ‘Roo rip.’ We have a few minutes to tear the outline of a kangaroo. The ‘Road Kill’ is collected up and voted on. We decide Jan’s must be hiding behind a rock.

We are catching up to a Road Train, this should be interesting. Where did all the water go in Alice? The river is still dry.

The [Ghan](#) is waiting for us in the station. Our bags are off loaded into a baggage car. We can only take an overnight bag on board with us.

I dash to the front of the train for some engine pictures. It is long, 26 carriages and two engines.

Before we started this trip I had told Jan we would have reclining seats to sit in. I could not have been more wrong. This is ‘Gold Kangaroo’ service. We have our own private compartment about 6’x 8’ complete with toilet, shower and hanging space. The ‘Hospitality Attendant’ stops by to give us a lesson on using the facilities. The toilet and hand basin fold down for use. “Don’t lift the toilet until you have flushed it...”

The Ghan has a reputation for not running on time, but we leave as scheduled.

A dirt road (track) runs for miles along side the railroad. There are fresh 4WD tracks in the mud. Eventually they turn off into nowhere. That is the only sign of life we see. “Look, there must be an airstrip, it’s a windsock.” More dirt roads to nowhere. The scrub grows in dense little patches, each isolated from its neighbor by a sea of barren red sand. A large raptor wings away. We spot a windmill, no doubt pumping water. Shallow holes have been scraped out along the dirt road to collect rain for the cattle. There is a dead animal and that’s the third dead tire I have seen.

We stop, why? This is a single line track, but here there are two. A freight train lumbers by. We are rolling again.

Every ten miles or so a communications tower stands sentinel.

We listen to a description of Central Australia over the intercom. All our group are in one car and we will be dining together. The next car is the lounge and beyond that the diner. We almost miss the reception. Adelaide time is one hour ahead and we should have advanced our watches when we boarded.

For dinner, I choose duck which comes on a slab of baked cheese. Not what I expected.

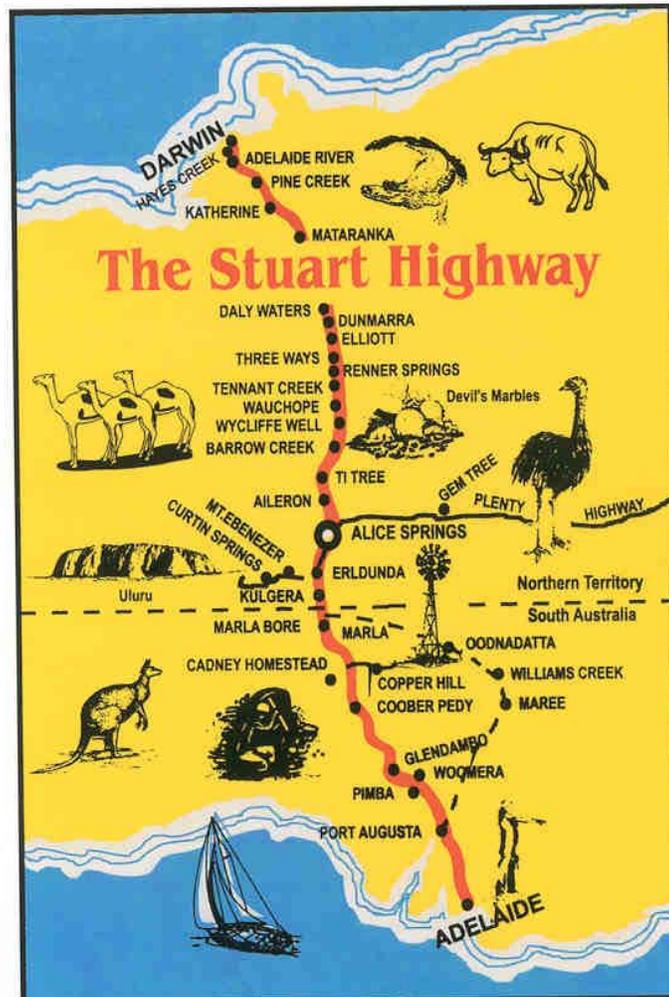
ROAD TRAINS



Mighty roadtrains hauling livestock or merchandise of every description are a common sight along the outback highways of Northern Territory, Queensland, South and Western Australia.

These huge giants of the road measure 50 metres

in length, weigh 115 tonnes and can have up to 60 wheels. They travel at a top speed of 85 kilometres an hour, however the very latest in modern technology and high tech braking and tracking systems make them the most energy efficient and cost effective mode of road transport in Australia.



After dinner 19 of our group hang out in the lounge. The merry widows play charades.

When we return to our compartment, it has been converted into a sleeping berth with two bunk beds, one above the other. I say a prayer and climb the ladder to heaven. There is nothing to hold me in. We are traveling at about 50 mph. The train has a lurching movement. We leave the blue night light on. Neither of us sleep.

It is dark. The train stops at Manguri, someone climbs to the ground, throwing down a suitcase. There is nothing there but a waiting 4WD labeled 'Mail Run.' We pass close to [Cooper Pedy](#) of opal fame.

The Ghan



504. The Station.



508. The Ghan.



516. Waiting for Dinner.



515. The Outback.



509. The Compartment.

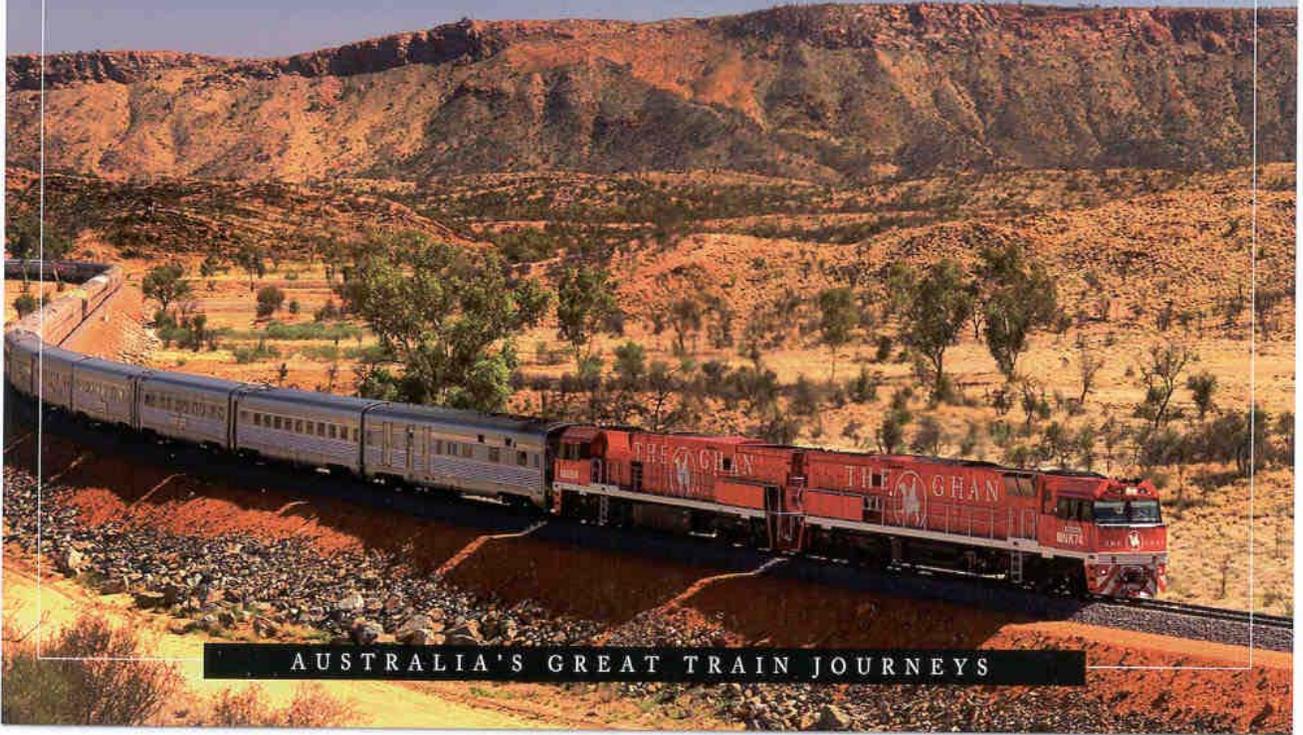


510. Walkway.



527. John.

THE GHAN



AUSTRALIA'S GREAT TRAIN JOURNEYS



Chapter 14 ~ The Ghan, Adelaide, Barossa Valley, Yaldara, Haigh's Chocolates, Friday 3rd February.

Up at 5:30am, I wipe down but don't want to risk a shower. We found the temperature comfortable, though some of our group were cold. At 6:00am sharp our attendant brings coffee and plastic milk. We move to the lounge car in anticipation of breakfast.

Dawn at 6:20am. The view is giving way to roads and small towns. We are still 2½hrs from Adelaide. The land is flat with large cultivated fields and silos for grain storage. A few trees but no livestock in sight.

Closer in to Adelaide nice homes are interspersed with untidy ones as if there is no plan. Here there are vast irrigated market gardens and row after row of tented greenhouses.

We arrive on time in Adelaide, Keswick Station, at 9:10am. It is 83°F. Jan runs to buy souvenir T-shirts in the train shop while I maneuver our large luggage to the bus.

Don says he slept like a baby, awake ever hour.....

Adelaide, with only 25" rain a year, is Australia's driest city. We bid our driver "G'day," and take a tour around town.

Unlike Sydney, Adelaide's layout was planned by [Col. William Light](#) in 1837. The streets are wide with room to turn a team of horses. Around the center is a green belt. We hear that the reason was not for esthetics but rather safety. The green belt is one cannon shot wide. The city is home to 1.2 million people. The main streets have royal names. The crossing streets have different names to left and right. The theory being that an underling may not cross a royal.

Home to a major sport, Sue explains [cricket](#).

In 1842, George Fife Angus brought persecuted Lutheran farmers from Germany, to settle in the [Barossa Valley](#). They planted vine-yards, orchards, and gardens, helping to establish the wine industry for which this region is famous.

We drive through the Barossa Valley. Rolling hills and Vineyards stretch in every direction. Each vine is capable of producing enough juice for one bottle. I am puzzled by the rose bushes at the end of each row. Apparently roses are subject to the same diseases as vines, but show symptoms two weeks sooner, allowing corrective action to be taken for the vines. The Barossa is one of the few areas free of [Phyloxera](#).

We have a quick stop for lunch in [Lyndoch](#), a nice little town. At a café we buy Cornish pasties.

Our coach has gear shift problems. The driver says it's him. I'm not so sure.



Adelaide - South Australia



Adelaide - South Australia

Barossa Valley



534. Lyndoch High Street.

536. Lyndoch.

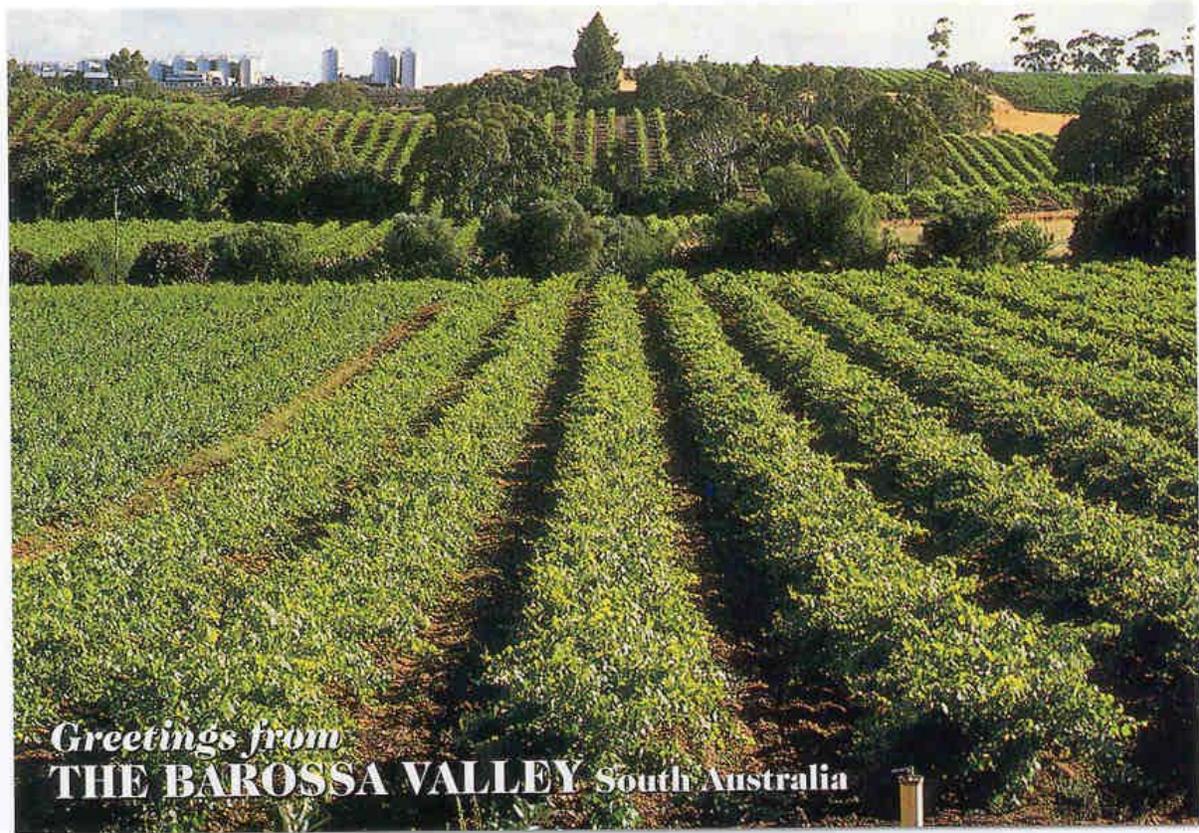
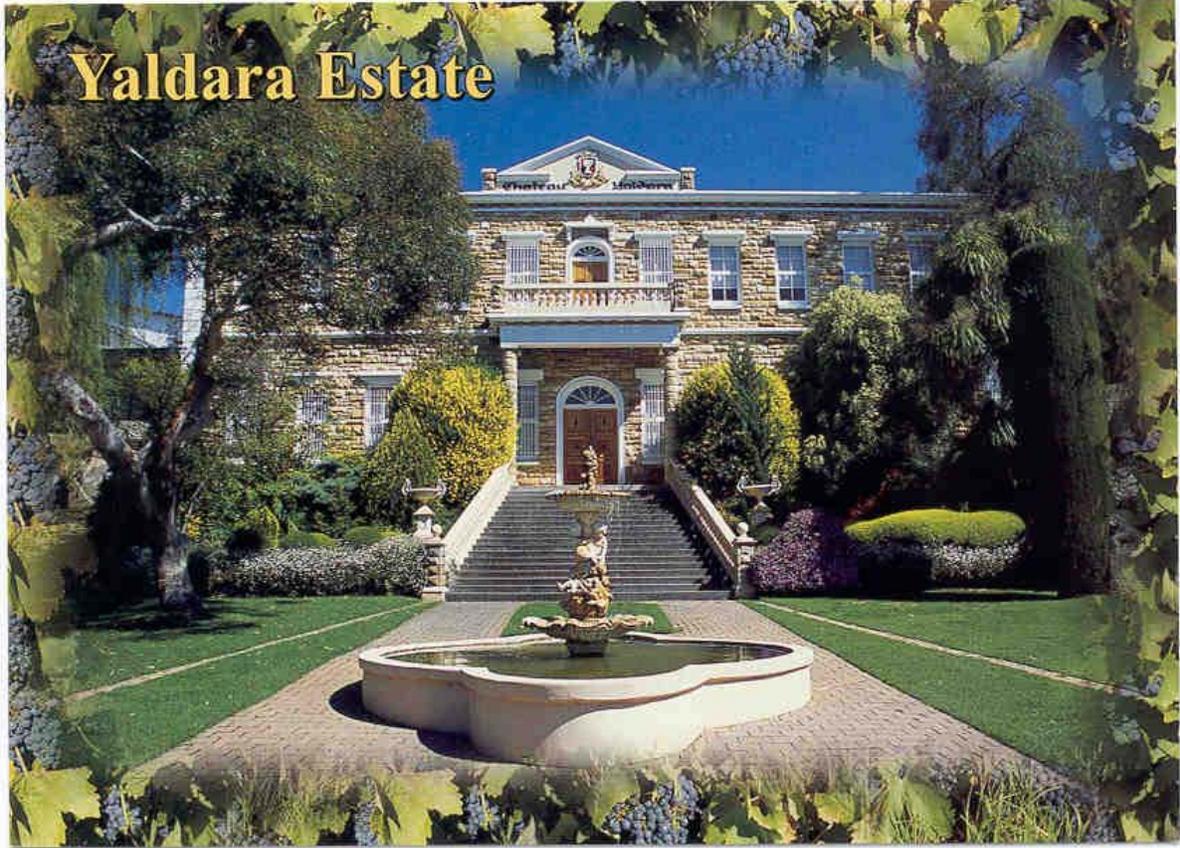
540. Maturing Port.



538. Yaldara Estate.



545. Ready for Tasting.



Our tour of the [Yaldara estate](#) was interesting, but focused mainly on the storage of wine, primarily port. We did not see the pressing, fermentation or fortification processes, which would have been most interesting to me. Yaldara uses cold fermentation and produces about 35 different wines at any one time.

Port has a long maturation in oak casks. The winery pays \$800 to \$1,300 for a hogs head barrel. These are burned inside before use. This gives the port certain qualities. From each cask they get four vintages before destroying them. That is, they are used four times.

At the wine tasting we try four vintages. Nice, but Australian wines are quite expensive. We learn that this is because of tax. In fact we can buy Australian wines cheaper in the USA.

We drive through [Gawler](#) which has lots of beautiful old sandstone buildings and boasts one of the first telegraph stations. Termites are a problem here. The telegraph poles are built from triangular concrete with steel rods at the corners. No food here.

[Haigh's](#) is a chocolate factory. We tour, watch rum balls being made and packing of Bilbys. Rabbits are not welcome in OZ. So, for Easter, the kids enjoy [Bilbys](#), a little marsupial which looks just like a rabbit.

We have another short tour of Adelaide. The tallest building is 31 stories. Magnificent old sandstone buildings.

Time for bed!

Chapter 15 ~ Melbourne, Victoria Market, the Tramcar, Saturday February 4th

In the airport we change from shorts into long pants. The flight is 1hr 10 min. There are strict quarantine laws between states. No fruit, airplane food or banana chips which seems strange.

Each day we change seats on the bus, so everyone has “the best seat once.” Today, I sit in the weather forecasters seat. Across the aisle from Sue, each morning this individual has to give the bus a weather forecast. Some have been hilarious. I was not prepared. Chuck hands me the (accurate) forecast for Melbourne, fine but cool, under 70°F. By the way, we have learnt that the locals pronounce it ‘*Melbun*’ no ‘R’.

We head for the [Queen Victoria Market](#). At first sight a flea market. We have about 45min to investigate, not nearly enough time. I bargain for two boomerangs. The vendor complains that I am not letting him make an honest living. We will return!

We board the [tram](#) for a late lunch. What an experience. The tram appears to be a creation from the turn of the century, and so it may be, but it has been fitted with stabilizers for a smooth ride. Air conditioned too. Curtains at the windows, white linen table cloths and a menu to please. So this is lunch. Champagne and wine, the alcohol flows. Happy birthday Jenny! The waiter has an excellent voice. We decide Amy and Arme must be on their Honeymoon. We all celebrate. Elaine has red wine spilled on her blouse. No there is not enough space to Conga.

[Melbourne](#) has the most impressive modern tram system I have ever seen. Hundreds of miles long. Our lunch excursion takes us to [St. Kilda](#), a little sea-side town.

We have one more day ‘at leisure’ which means we will be going our separate ways tomorrow. Jan & I and another couple are leaving the tour which goes on to New Zealand. We say ‘see you later’ not goodbye.

We walk about a mile through the tourist shopping district, over the [Yara river](#) to the South Bank.

The sun has not set, but time for supper. “No sir, we are all booked up until very late.”

We finally find a seat at Othello’s. Don’t be in a hurry. I order Barramundi. This is the only bad meal we have all the time in Australia. It comes whole. Head tail and guts. Now that I don’t mind, but it tastes muddy. The rice is fresh out of the packet, and the veggies are still growing. Oh, well. Jan’s lamb was good.

We walked back. My legs are tired. We stopped at an internet café. I guess I am new at this. It’s not a café at all. No food or drink. Just lines of computers. It is inexpensive. I Email home.

We stop in the Marriott Bar. None of our group are there. Must be at the casino.

I hate plastic room keys!

Streets of Melbourne



558. Queen Victoria Market.



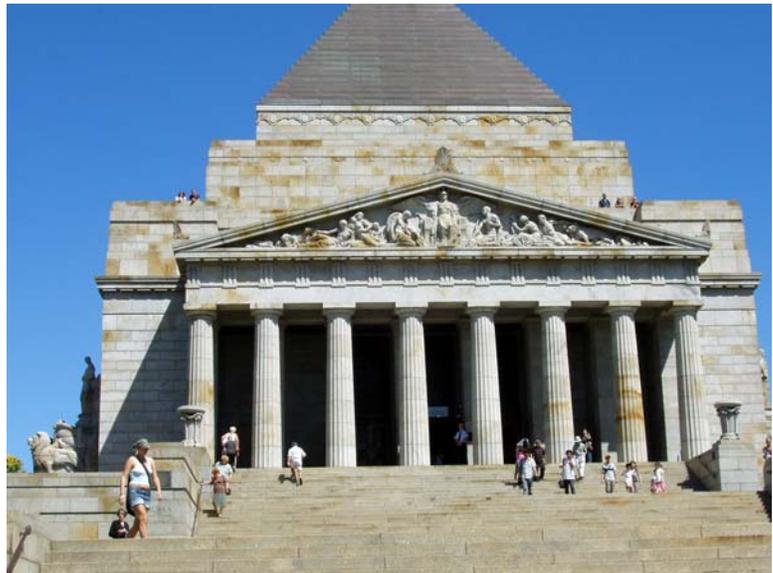
561. More Junk.



617. Swanston St.



619. Horse & Carriage.



612. Shrine of Remembrance.

Lunch on the Tram



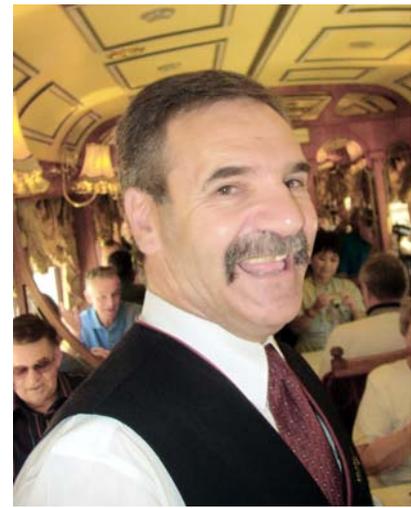
566. New Tram.



567. Restaurant Tram.



606. The Car.



602. Singing Waiter.

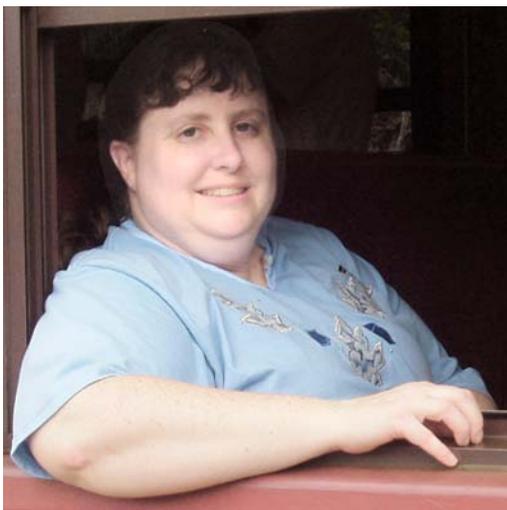


586. A Corner in Saint Kilda.



569. Sitting for Dinner.

Table Companions





MELBOURNE
— AUSTRALIA —

**Chapter 16 ~ Melbourne, QV Market, Boat trip to Williamstown,
Sunday 5th February.**

We walk to the QV market, further than we thought. These city blocks are as deceiving as those in Chicago. There we spent about two hours. We bought tourist trinkets and T-shirts. "Where do you get the free tram back to the hotel?"

We again walk to the Yalara, and found a bar opposite the train station where we could people watch. Two burgers and chips, a couple of beers and a coke, \$30. The burgers must be ten ounces. Bright sun, 84°F. This has to be tourist central.

"Let's take a boat down the river to Williamstown." We sit in the back, sorry aft, and watch the bridges and condo towers disappear. Some are low, duck! Container ships, harbor traffic, control tower, cranes. Almost an hour to the little sea side resort, so busy on a Sunday.

It is hot, I wear a handkerchief for a hat.

A shame. No one told us the next boat was the last to return. We could have gone back by train. We only had 40 min in Williamstown. Oh well, we would only have spent money. That was a nice ice cream though.

The boat set off from the key, and turned in the wrong direction. "Is this the ferry back to Melbourne?"

"Yes, we are going to pass the tall ships."

There is some kind of regatta, and several tall masted sailing ships are in port. We cruise close by. As we return up the river, a tall sailing ship is stuck under one of the bridges. The crew are tilting it to free the mast.

Our 'Captain' is in training with a superior and hits the dock, hard.

I can't determine where the free circle tram leaves from, so we walk back to the hotel, again.

After last night's experience, we have reservations at the Mecca. We look up at the stars. I have still not seen the Southern Cross. This was a top class meal. It is the Chinese New Year and we watch the fireworks.

Yarra River, Melbourne



563. North Bank.

621. Princess Bridge.



632. South Bank promenade.

Boat to Williamstown



645. Crown Entertainment Complex.



653. Williamstown.

646. Convention Centre.



671. Condos.



661. Tall Ship.

Chapter 17 ~ The end, Monday, February 6th

Our tour group departed early this morning for New Zealand. We had a leisurely breakfast and attempted to return to our room around 10:00am only to find that our plastic key had expired. They are date and time stamped. At least we found out when we tried to use the elevator.

We had our own limo driver take us to the airport.

Australia is the only country I know which requires you to clear immigration on exit. We handed over our GST documents and then walked through a large duty free shopping area where we bought some Black Label, but nothing else.

The kangaroo painted on the tail of our 747-400 looks slightly worse than our paper cut outs. The flight out of Melbourne had 130 empty seats, so the stewardess organized who sat with an extra seat between them.

“Sorry, we are out of chicken.” So I settle for beef. The cucumber took a gravitational excursion down my shirt. One for the dry cleaners.

I finally understand how to use the TV control.

We are flying at 594mph at 37,000ft. Outside it is - 49°F. The lady behind has yacked all night.

At US immigration in LA we are asked, “Nearest arterial road; zip code, area code, married how long, born where?”

The flight to O’Hare is freezing. We are both glad to cover up with a blanket.

We try to call Larry’s cell phone, but the pay phone will only allow local calls. Still, they are both at the Clock Tower and we make it home. Exhausted! But what a lot of memories.