

Day 2 in Oz

It seems that the Australians are a curious people. To think all of this beauty was created by muggers and petty thieves! If only England had seen fit to send a few architects and artists.



My first meal was oysters and smoked salmon bruschetta on the Circular Quay (pronounced "Key") at the foot of the Opera House. Oh yeah, I had a mug of the local cold brew. I spent the rest of the day walking through the botanic gardens. The sound of exotic birds was all around me. As I sat on a bench, a golden ibis walked within 10 feet of me (or 3m in the local jargon).

The remainder of the time I spent finding my way back to the hotel. It was a good thing I had obtained a trusty map from one of the natives. Unfortunately, I kept getting distracted by the architecture and wandered far from my necessary path. Fortunately, I found a short cut and was soon back in my room and boy were my dogs barking! After the 14.5 hr. flight from LA (not to mention the 4.5 hr. flight to LA), I had about all of the excitement I could stand for the day. I took a brief 4 hr. nap, awoke and had a plate of fish and chips for dinner. (The natives called it fried flathead and charged me \$16 for it.)



Today, well rested, I walked back to Circular Quay and enjoyed a luncheon cruise of Sydney Harbor. I must have 100 pictures of the Opera House. Afterward I was treated to a bus tour of the city and saw everything from the hoity-toity to the red light district. I am even now planning for entertainment latter this evening.



We visited Bondi Beach, famous for surfing and nude swimming. I actually observed two naked buttocks. Unfortunately, they belonged to two local surfer dudes who saw fit to change into their speedos on the frigging beach. I did get pictures for those that care (you know who I mean, Lottie.)

After returning to my hotel, I strolled down to The Rocks to take my dinner. Let me set the record straight, Kangaroo will never replace good old beef or even lamb. Even if you stuff it with mushrooms and oysters!

Well, tomorrow I am off to the Blue Mountains. Perhaps I will discover some of the local wildlife (not counting the shella's I have come across).

Must check in with my native porters for the trip details.



I'll try to include pictures in future epistles.

Loretta, the hat has really come in handy.

Buie, I only have 512 pictures left on my camera. Not to worry, I have another memory card that will hold 362 more.

All from Oz,
George

Day 3 in Oz

Wednesday, Feb 20, 5am.



It is actually day 4 but I was unable to write yesterday and, being unable to sleep today, I felt I should catch up on my journal whilst I am able.

Yesterday, we finally journeyed out of Sydney. Along with 57 fellow travelers and our local guide, Lou, we ventured forth into the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains are so named because the oil exuded from the eucalyptus tree refracts the sunlight towards the indigo end of the spectrum. (Oddly enough, as we gazed back

upon Sydney, it also took on a bluish hue.)

One of our stops was to observe three towering sandstone monoliths named the Three Sisters. Here I relate to you the legend of the Three Sisters as told to us by our trusty guide, Lou, and as best I can recollect names and events.

Once there lived a great shaman. We will call him the Nevil man. He possessed three beautiful daughters that he treasured above all of the kangaroo scrotum pouches in the land. Now, the Nevil man was want to travel to various valleys in search of food. On one such trip, his beautiful daughters accompanied him.

There dwelt in this valley a monster we will call the Aaron. To me, this seemed fraught with danger to take his daughters to such a place. However, the Arron was nocturnal and the Nevil man thought he could get in and out quickly. As fate would have it, they overstayed their time and, soon, the Aaron was in hot pursuit. Loving his beautiful daughters



dearly, he decided that the only way to save them was to turn them to stone. Thus he waved his magic bone and turned them to stone. To save himself, he turned himself into a bird, fully planning to return at daylight and resurrect his beautiful daughters. Here is where I question the wisdom of this particular shaman. For it immediately became evident that a bird, possessing no hands, is unable to grasp a bone! Duhh! To this day, the Nevil man, in the form of a bird, continues to search for the bone and to bring his beautiful daughters back to life.

While the fate of the Nevil man's daughters is one of great sorrow, they being so young and beautiful, it afforded me the opportunity to engrave their image in silicon more times than I can count.



As we left the Blue Mountains and returned once again to flat land (and straight roads), Lou took us on a safari of Australian wildlife. Here we saw roos, koala, goanna, kookaburras, Tasmanian devils, crocks and tropical birds beyond count and of unerring beauty. I saw dingoes and was struck at how much they resembled my dear Dusty. We were able to approach the roos close enough to touch and, after a delightful ceremony called "Billie tea", we were allowed to approach the souvenirs close enough to purchase!

Our final sight was that of the Sydney Olympics Park as it streamed by at 90kph. Lou, ever the faithful guide, urged us to contact his employers to see it up close.

Thus concluded Day 3 in Oz. We ate nothing stranger than macadamia nuts.

Today I take leave of this beautiful city. We travel across the Snowy Mountains where we shall stop at Mt. Ainslie to gaze upon the capital city of Canberra. We will spend some time there before proceeding on to Melbourne. Thus I will discover if this entire continent is possessed of barking toilets and extravagant prices!

Before ending, let me relate a most curious phenomenon. We left LA on Fri Feb 15 and arrived in Sydney on Sun Feb 17. Now, this journey took 14.5hrs and yet I did not experience Sat Feb 16. Perhaps this phenomenon was caused by our simultaneous crossing of the International dateline and the equator. All I know is I did not experience 2/16/2002 and it shall not come around again until the ending of this universal cycle and well into the next. It is unlikely that I will live that long. I only hope that, in the counting of my days, I am given credit for this one missed. And do not say that I will get the day back on the return trip. To do so, I would have to leave on Sat and arrive on Fri and that is not to happen. (I wonder if those that work on this route are actually many years older than they look and are kept young by flying back and forth. Surely, this is too high a price to pay for immortality!)

Amy dearest, I look forward to your joining me in Alice Springs.

Glenda, give my regards to Dusty and Bandit and assure them that I will return safe and sound.

Loretta, tell dear Stephanie that her labors were not for naught and that I appreciate all of her works. Better yet, forward this to her as I do not have her email address.

Bill, I fired off another 96 shots yesterday. I fear that if I do not pace myself, I will find myself wanting before this trek is ended.

I must go, Canberra and Melbourne by the sea await me.

Until our next opportunity, I remain your humble traveler.
George

Day 6 in Oz

February 22, 2002.

I've been here almost a week now and things grow curiouiser by the day. We have spent the last two days in the bush where time runs slow and technology is low. I awoke this morning not to the sound of an alarm clock but to the screeching of three fighting cockatoos (and they weren't in cages). But I get ahead of myself.



On Wed, our first real foray into the bush took us over the Inland Range and to the capital city of Canberra. For this extended trip, we had as our trusty guides Des the knowledgeable and Sue the lovely. Both barraged us with information. Des

would often "misinform" and follow it with a howling laugh from deep in his gut.

It seems that the Sydneyese and the Melbournites fought fiercely over the right to be the capital city of Australia. In the end, they were sent to their rooms and it was decided that a brand new city would be built to be the capital. A contest was held to chose a designer and, out of 175 entries, it was awarded to a husband/wife team from Chicago. Neither had ever laid eyes on Australia, let alone the site of Canberra. What finally arose from a



treeless granite plain is the most beautiful of cities. All spanking brand new. Even the suburbs are designed and built to be self sufficient so that those that live there do not have to go to the city proper to shop or school. And they have planted trees everywhere. One thing that continues to strike me, under the authority of the "Crown" many things are done for the common good without concern for the benefit to others far away. On the other hand, perhaps this is similar to our "pork".

Thursday we left Canberra and crossed the Snowy Mountains through the Kosciusko National Park. We climbed into the ski country where Des explained that this was the most expensive ski area in the world. Many people find it cheaper to fly to New Zealand than to go there. This is caused by the fact that they only get snow a few days during the year and the demand is great.

We finally left the winding road of Kosciusko and discovered ...ROOS! There were roos before us, roos behind us, roos to either side of us. Roos seem to do three things - they lay in the grass, they suckle if they are young, and, most of all, they scratch! This was truly a unique experience. According to the lovely Sue, they often see only one or two. Our mob probably totaled 20-30. This alone was worth the price of the expedition.

Today, we made our way from the town of Beechworth to Melbourne. Beechworth is an historic town primarily because of the gold rush of approximately 150 years ago. Whilst





in Beechworth, aside from being awakened by screeching cockatoos, we were entertained by a local gent of some renown known as "Lazy Harry". Lazy sang us songs of the Outback, songs about drinking, songs about how Ozzies talk and dress, but mostly he sang songs about his dearest love, Australia. And we all joined in for a rousing rendition of "Waltzing Matilda". Now this is the de facto national anthem of Australia, though not the de jure (nor the du jour).

On awakening and taking breakfast, we were escorted to spend some time with a local named Jeff. He has a last name, but I do not recall it. Now Jeff is the real deal. He talks dirty, spits between his teeth and brews as good a billy tea as any bloke in the bush. He also has two mixed breed Clydesdales and two scruffy looking, though friendly, dogs.

We then had a tour of the town with a local named Ian who has written several books on the historical significance of Beechworth. He also related the story of Ned Whatshisname and his family. He was either "Robin Hood" or a murdering scoundrel, depending on whom you ask.

Finally crawled back out of the bush to Melbourne. We are established in a hotel of great fancy. The rooms do not start until the 35th floor. I reside on the 41st and look out over the sea!

Supper tonight was in the local Chinatown. No #3 with egg roll here. I had pot sticker dumplings, dried scallop soup and clams with garlic sauce and the special fried rice. Take my word for it, this cannot be found in Tennessee!!!!

As usual, time is short and here I must end. I have another day here in civilization before heading for the Outback and reuniting with my dear daughter. I must leave Sue and Des and many of my traveling companions at this point. I will write again before I go since who knows when I will find access in the godforsaken interior.

Glenda, tell Frank I've had three meat pies. However, not that rough Scottish stuff but such delicacies as meat with mushrooms and tomatoes and meat with curry sauce. No HP sauce to be found.

Lottie, not to worry, no strange meat for you! A coin, how could I forget that?

Ken, I have your vegemite. It comes in a package and is made by Kraft. I have not eaten the crap.

Until later, just one of the mob,

George

Day 7 in Oz

February 23, 2002



Melbourne. What can I say of Melbourne that has not already been said of the other civilized areas that I have encountered. This is a city of such beauty. Yes, it still possesses the barking



toilets, but one gets used to such things over time. Such cathedrals, parks and fountains, statues on every corner, surely it rivals the great cities of Europe.

My memorable excursion today took me to the Remembrance Memorial. This is dedicated to those Victorians that have lost their lives in the service of their country. In the center of the memorial they have a stone recessed into to floor and on it is inscribed "Greater Love Hath No Man". The ceiling contains an opening that, on the 11th hour of the 11th day

of the 11th month, causes a brilliant ray of sunlight to traverse the stone. In its journey, it reportedly shines on the word "Love" with an ethereal light. This effect (though much diminished) was reproduced for our small company whilst "Last Post" was sounded in the background.

If I have not remarked before, the Australian people are very close to their military history. Perhaps it is because their country was said to have been baptized in the Battle of Galipoli in Turkey in WWI when the country was yet to see its 20th year. Perhaps it is because WWII was fought in their backyard here in the Pacific. Or perhaps it is the love of country that is instilled in the British people stemming from their vast empire on which it was once said that the sun did not set.

Well, I awakened this day 41 stories in the air and gazed out upon a dark and gloomy day. (Perhaps this was because it was 5:30!) I was cheered when I reached the breakfast butteries. What can I say. Dates and figs, rocket melons and strawberries, locks and cream cheese with capers and onions and mushrooms that I must nominate as King of All Fungi! Surely the Queen herself breakfasted no better than I. Even as I ate, the sun broke through the clouds and cast its rays upon the bay and river below. Surely this day would stand out.

Well, this will be my last day in civilization for some days to come. I must depart this fair city for Alice Springs and the Outback. It is said that of the 10 most deadly snakes in the world, Australia is home to 10 of them! Along with the deadly spiders, it will take all of my skills to survive the ordeal. I must be off to provision myself with some of the local clothing so that, should my desiccated body be found years hence in the desert, it will be known that I visited Melbourne. Ah, at least my dear daughter will be here! She is even now traversing the thousands of miles of endless ocean. It is my hope that the same time vortex that almost consumed me does not engulf her!

I add here a few observances that should be of help to any that follow.

The toilet paper, while being narrower, is longer. That is, the distance between the perforations is

greater. The overall effect is that you probably get about the same area per sheet, but when you put a new roll on, it tends to rub against the wall and you get "short sheeted" with the first pulls.

The newspapers are too wide!. They take up so much room on the breakfast table that there's no room left over for the plate! And what bloke would sacrifice plate room for a little news. (I would be happier were the newspapers narrower and the TP wider.)

The coffee here is excellent! However, the cups are always too small and 80% percent of the time you hail the waiter, he is carrying a pot of blasted TEA! A pox on the bloody English and their bloody tea.

They serve grilled tomatoes for breakfast, which, in itself, is ok. Then they proceed to put something resembling pork and beans on top. Exactly what it is will have to remain a mystery. How this got to be breakfast food is beyond me. (I must relate here that I also observed this some years ago whilst in merry old England.)

Oh yeah, they drive on the wrong side of the street! When you step off of the curb, you'd better look right rather than left or you'll be squashed like a bug. (Or is it look left rather than right? Hhmmm.)

Bill, John, Scott D, you'll be happy to know that the Ausies have not discovered coarse ground pepper. If anything, the pepper is more finely ground than in the old days in America. As a result, you can get all of the pepper you wish out of a single hole without removing the top! (A good thing, since all the peppershakers I have met are porcelain and their tops do not come off.)



Well, must be off to Alice Springs. I hear they are known for their CHICKEN! Do not know if they have enough technology for me to write before reaching Cairns.

Until then, I remain ever vigilant of critters.

George

Thursday, February 28, 2002

Cairns. Well, here it is day 13 (I think) in Oz.

As anticipated, Amy arrived in Alice Springs on Sunday. Unfortunately, her flight into Sidney was late and, after rushing her to catch her flight to Alice Springs, her bags didn't make the connection. They did not catch up to us until we got to Ayers Rock Resort. And to add insult to injury, they had taken her key to the luggage lock in Sidney and did not see fit to send it on with the bags. After a bottle of Shiraz Cabernet (a '99 I think) and some work with sturdy implements, all was put to right and Amy was relieved. (A clean pair of undies will do this to a person.)



But I get ahead of myself. We spent the afternoon visiting sights around Alice Springs such as Simpson's Gap and Angkerie. I had expected the US Southwest during a drought. However, central Australia (or Centralia as the

locals call it) has experienced considerable rain in the last 5 years and the vegetation is lush. We observed some water holes that were inviting enough for skinny-dipping but, because we were both of a genteel nature and in mixed company, refrained from the urge.

That night in Alice Springs I had, among other things, chicken. If the chicken were the only reason to go to Alice, I would recommend staying at home.

The next day we started with a stop at Anzac Hill. Anzac stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corp. This was, of course, a monument to the Alice Springians that had fallen in battle. We later visited the School of the Air, which services 122 home schooled children in an area the size of Texas using radio, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service that flies to patients' needs throughout Centralia.

We journeyed from there to Ayers Rock. In 1984, Australia undertook a repatriation project to return certain sites back to the Aborigines. Among these was Ayers Rock, which also reverted to its Aboriginal name of Uluru (pronounced Oo'-lah-roo'). Of course, the government wrote itself a 99-year lease before signing the papers.

Uluru, Uluru, I first beheld you at sunset in your majesty and your mystery. I walked in the morning breezes among the paths at your feet and among the cooliba trees, the Liru walk. I beheld your holy places of power and solitude. I discovered your clear pools of life giving water. I leave you changed, though I know not how, oh Uluru, Uluru.

I should add that Amy was sorely disappointed that, because of the rains the night before, she was unable to climb Uluru. It seems that Uluru is slippery when wet.

As I said above, we experienced a rain of biblical proportions while at Ayers Rock Resort. Over 8 inches of rain fell in two days, 1 of which fell in one hour. The bugs were scrambling for high ground.

We finally left the outback for Cairns (pronounced "Cahns" by the locals). I must say that our stay in the outback required every bit of knowledge that I had gained week before in the bush to survive. I have pictures of some of the reptiles that we encountered including the ferocious Thorny Devil.



Cairns is a seaside resort. We have had to shift our schedule to accommodate the Queen's visit. Somehow, I do not believe that she would do the same if we came to England.

We leave Australia on Saturday at 5:30 am. We will journey from Cairns to Sidney to LA to Dallas and finally to Nashville. We will not see anything but the inside of a terminal or airplane for 25+ hours until we finally return to the Land of the Volunteers. I will probably have no more transmissions from Oz.

Ken, if you want to know how vegemite tastes, you will have to find out yourself. As for the barking toilets, I first encountered them in Sidney. If you do not know of what I speak, I will have to wait until I can add sound effects.



Cissy, Glenda, tell Frank that I will try to call from Sidney to confirm our schedule. He will probably hear from me late Fri. afternoon. And I will check in from LA or Dallas to confirm that we are on time.

That will be sometime Sat. (morning or afternoon, I do not know.) Delores should probably check with him sometimes Sat. to make sure we are on time.

John (not Flew), I just write 'em.

Observation, I have not had a good steak anywhere in this sun burnt country.

Signing off
George