

Sunday 4th December: Melbourne

Still in Singapore, and after serious packing, went for a walk round Little India – not as great a tourist destination as China Town but impressive Temple (and Methodist Church). Left for Airport earlier than we might have done as more civilised hanging round there than hotel vacated at noon.

First time for us on a monster plane with upstairs and down, and 10 seats across. I agonised about the bloody thing being able to get off the ground! The rumblings of gizmos while taking off and landing are more disquieting for me than on other planes we've used. Quantas look after us well; staff markedly more mature than those on any other airline we've flown with. After watching two movies, and with sleep *still* eluding me, I opted for *Stephen Fry at Sydney Opera House* (squealed and chuckled with delight!) and by then it was breakfast time!



Melbourne cool and feeling chilly after our seven/eight weeks of tropical temperatures. Lucinda and BJ live in spacious, unusual apartment, built around a courtyard (complete with troublesome possum) and accessed by what appears to be an unremarkable garage-like frontage. BJ (Barry John) is preparing the barbie as I type. I managed to get myself lost walking around the block – Clever stuff!

Monday

Nick very impressed with barbie (actually we all were) - *real* eating! Dear Angela has given up her right to the guest bedroom for us – I hope she is not regretting our being here!

Today, started to 'do' Melbourne. I love the trams – they give a real yesteryear feel, as do the crossings – a wonderful clunkety-clunk on the traffic lights tells you it is safe to cross instead of the high-pitched 21st Century beeps. Arrived in Federation Square having passed various sporting venues, including the Rod Laver Tennis Centre, reminds us that we are



now in a nation passionate about sport. Federation Square has a distinctly individual feel with a mix of architecture, different styles, adjacent to each other. Most Squares have an open feel with grand buildings surrounding them – this was *entirely* different: lots of modern architectural stuff within the square, which you wander around. Not certain how much I liked it, but I understand that the angularity and the colours are supposed to reflect the 'classic' Australian



landscape of the interior. After a coffee (and Melbourne is a coffee Mecca) – a ‘flat white’ – we jumped on the freebie tram which makes a circuit of the city centre, disembarking by the Harbour Esplanade. Here there was certainly a feeling of ‘wide open spaces’ with distant high-rise buildings beyond the waterfront. Nick was totally unable to walk past a fish and chip kiosk. Consequently, we sat in the breeze, enjoying lunch under a blue sky. Then we returned to the Square and did a wander around the delightful lanes and arcades before returning to Richmond. Lu had prepared an delicious lamb curry. Nick and Angela went out bat-spotting after supper and saw just one monster, reported to be larger than a crow!



Tuesday



Today, the three of us sallied forth in a southerly direction to the sea side, where we walked the esplanade and along the pier at St Kilda beach and also did a heritage walk inland awhile, enjoying some very fine houses.

All this in a climate which is becoming distinctly summery, Melbourne having experienced a cool and wet spring and early summer to date; no need for the

third layer which I bought along with me, and even the second layer was soon removed.

Then it was time for a coffee and a return to one of the large markets which made me *really, really* want to live here – there was a wonderful displays of fish, meat and deli, then equally fab fruit and veg, much of it organic. We have also experienced our first Ops Shop (Op=Opportunity) – the Australian Charity Shop.

But we had to return to Richmond where Nick had arranged to pick up the car, a Micra, in which yours truly and himself are ‘doing’ the Great Ocean Road, hopefully starting early tomorrow. Tonight dear Lu and BJ are relieved of their culinary tasks; we are cooking the fish we bought in the market, serving with new potatoes and salad.



Wednesday to Friday: Great Ocean Road



Set off before seven and that cool dude, Nick, drove us right into the city of Melbourne and then out along the M1 in a south westerly direction toward Geelong (pronounced *J-long*). By 10.00, and a stint at the wheel by yours truly around some hairy bends, we were well on to the Great Ocean Road and before 11.00 we were sitting in the sun having coffee and croissant (Nick, a doughnut as well!) at Lorne, the ocean just across the road and a number of 'cockies' (cockatoos) wanting a share. The

road was built by Australian soldiers back from the WWI and takes in an amazing coastline and also some beautiful inland countryside: we were so lucky to



enjoy it in glorious sunshine. As with much of our world travels I'm afraid it was a sort of whistle-stop affair and we spent much of it, yesterday in the National Otways Park (learn more forthwith). But we will return (and before the end of the month). We stopped along the way at the numerous viewing points, impressed by the glorious sweeping beaches and coves! Beyond Apollo Bay the road leaves the coast and turns inland, touching the coast again at



Castle Cove and inland again to Lavers Hill and just past the small gathering of buildings we spotted a B&B with a vacancy sign. The brilliant mass of orange flowers at the roadside entrance had caught my attention and we pulled in off the road to a one storey dwelling, Southern Height is situated in 15 acres with beautiful gardens and a landscaped vista offering magnificent views across totally unspoiled countryside to Cape Otway and Station Beach in the distance (see header). Lex and Mary showed us the room and it was difficult to say nay, even when we shuddered at the different price we were paying here in comparison with SE ASia. We allowed ourselves one of our two nights, this indulgence. Then on to the splendours of the Twelve Apostles and Loch Ard Gorge, where the sea has eroded the limestone cliffs with spectacular effect. It was here we could appreciate the popularity of this coast as there were dozens of buses with tourists (mostly Asian and Chinese). They, it seems, have replaced the Americans as world tourists. I know it seems the day could not be improved upon, but it was!



Our fellow guests were an American couple who spend half the year travelling. Katie's knowledge of how air-miles can work for you, and also of the vagaries of booking, which allow free nights, allow her and Jim to indulge their passion for travel and there are few parts of the world they haven't visited. London (from California!) is a regular destination, not for any great love of the place (I guess they prefer Australia!) but the journey earns them extra miles!! We really connected: had a meal together at a basic Ozzie Diner up the road (complete with characters from a film set!) and talked till late, then again over breakfast till midday, with our hosts!



Jim, a sprightly 74 year-old is into the extreme 'sport', bungee jumping, and will only attempt the world's highest!! (was most dismissive when Nick mentioned the Clifton Bridge jump). He is also a bird watcher (but definitely not an obsessive) and a sky watcher. They travel light – 7 weeks with a compact holdall apiece and tend to avoid other Americans. We left with some truffles, hand-made by Mary.

Lex had told us that the Triplet Falls, a mere 30 minutes away, was worth a visit and we had decided to return inland but we took a wrong turn, and were disappointed to find a rather sad looking threesome of rapids. Of course, we were totally off track, and furthermore, carried on instead of turning about. The track looked good – well manageable and Jac's repeated requests to turn around were ignored. and the track was dry and potholes and ruts were carefully avoided until, we came down an incline and there was a muddy, watery hollow.



"No!" she screamed!

"Yes!" he said, impatient with her negativity!

So in we went, and there we stopped!. A couple of hours were spent attempting to get wood and stuff under the wheels, jacking the car up, but help had to be called, and fortunately we had a phone signal. Six or seven hours later, having seen no one all this time, at nightfall, a Land Rover type vehicle finally reached us and pulled us out! Nick was in such a filthy mess and needless to say, miserable – nay abject! Our rescuer, Wes, was totally calm and his wife offered sustenance – they even phoned today to check how we were and with advice on products to clean the inside, which was nearly as bad as the outside.

It was well gone ten by the time we were back on the Ocean Road: emotionally and materially exhausted, we found a lay-by and settled for the night (illegal). At dawn we travelled on and saw a spectacular sunrise above Apollo Bay. Nick went down to the sea to wash the caked mud off his feet and sandals and we were certainly ready for breakfast in Lorne. Amazingly, thanks to a *lazar* car wash just outside Geelong, and further thanks to the incredible interior car-cleaning expertise of the wonderfully generous Helen Glare in Lara, where we stopped en route back to Melbourne the car was returned to the hire depot in showroom condition. We were even cleaned as well, Helen offering shower and towels, much appreciated.



Another mishap this afternoon – relatively minor thankfully: Nick dropped his bank card at the petrol station and the guy there put it into the ATM – a standard procedure but another hurdle to overcome as Wes needs paying! We intend to have a quiet weekend and to take absolutely no risks at all!

Watch this space!

Sunday: At Melbourne Quakers

Yesterday 30 degrees; a powerful stormy night with thunder and lightning which came and went; today 18 degrees! Apparently, that's typical Melbourne weather. As one Quaker lady told us, 'Go out in a sundress and a few hours later you'll be needing your winter woollies' and, of course vice versa. It took two trams to get to our destination. As we were walking in we were greeted warmly by a couple who knew Reading Meeting as did another couple, Brendon and his partner are from Reading and will be back there in May. Also another couple who have lived here for 30 years knew of Reading – so we had the correct pronunciation of Reading and Berkshire all round! Pretty amazing when there were just about 40 of us there.

It was a lovely Meeting – much appreciated as I haven't been to a Meeting for Worship since Garstang, way back in late September, or was it early October. And Nick joined me, which was nice. Some interesting ministry –one, very personal about conflict in her life and how a Quakerly background helped her; another about the storm and how awesome Nature is, particularly on this continent. The third referred to a Seamus Heaney poem about water divining and how a person with that special 'gift' can locate water, even when he/she places an arm on a non-gifted child. He went on to say that coming to Meeting had that effect on him, offering spiritual insight and strength. In effect Meeting provided that strong contact, allowing him to get in touch with the Divine.

The final Ministry was rather formal. An Indian gentleman stood up, walked to a prominent place and thanked the Meeting. He had been staying with family here for an extended time and

had walked past the Meeting House, intrigued. Having spotted a lady in the garden one day he spoke to her and learned about Quakers. Consequently he has been attending Meeting for Worship and has come to believe that this was a 'holy' place. He then gave a formal Hindu salutation and returned to his seat. Having visited so many Hindu temples lately with their numerous Gods and ritual offerings, I was amazed that he responded to the low key Quaker way of worship. There is a lot of involvement in the community here – the Meeting House has accommodation, one unit currently being used by an asylum seeker. I understand there is involvement in a local aboriginal support centre and after Meeting a Quaker Aid Worker was doing a presentation of his work in Southern India.

Wednesday : Bega



No rest for the wicked! Off again in our blue Micra, eastward from Melbourne, this time with Angela, to see her Auntie Irene who came over to Oz on the \$10 boat, back in 1966 on the *Australius*. We were a tad late sorting ourselves out and it was eleven-ish when we left Melbourne making for the Princes Highway where we travelled past the Ernst Wanke Highway, passed Gum Scrub Creek, NarNarGoon and such like places, arriving in Lakes Entrance around 4-ish. Angela freaked out cos the

motel was a bit too basic for her taste! It was the cream-coloured breeze-blocks that did it! Neither did the myriad buildings built to accommodate the hundreds of tourists visiting impress her or us. Seemingly there was absolutely no sense of the town planning which might enhance the beauty such a lovely place: namely, the outstandingly beautiful Gippsland Lakes inland behind of Ninety Mile Beach and beyond, Bass Straight. And we were **so** lucky as our 'more-to-be-desired motel' looked out over the lakes and islands and we enjoyed the most fabulous sunset. In actual fact, our accommodation offered clean, comfortable beds and an excellent shower.



After a rainy night we set off on the second leg of our journey, first stop, Orbost for coffee, where we encountered the best ever, enormous Opp Shop, where yours-truly bought a silk two-piece and a Thai silk blouse, all for the princely sum of \$7! Ideal for the cruise home!! She also managed to mislay her specs, thus delaying progress for awhile till they were located, having been found hanging on a dress

in the Opp Shop. Then there was a long, tedious stretch through forest/bush until suddenly the country opened out and we were out of Victoria and into New South Wales where we stopped awhile in Eden, a lovely coastal town with small bays and a wonderful, sweeping surfing bay. By four o'clock Nick had found our destination, having located and memorised the location on Google Earth the previous night.

Now Aunty Irene is a lively 70+ widow, not much of an Australian accent and *such* an interesting history. When she first arrived here, her husband Brian was teaching art in school-time but in the hols he painted for the circus and fairground rides . The five of them, two girls and the son, born shortly after they arrived, would travel all around this part of Australia with the circus. Although she had quite a serious cancer a few years back, with attendant chemo and radio-therapy, she has bounced back and, unbelievably manages a big garden (limited view from verandah, above), with grass-cutting and lopping of fast-growing trees and shrubs. Wonder-woman!



Last evening, after supper, we went for a walk to the river, way down-hill. Just back in February the water was 20 feet up, that after eight, ten years of drought when this beautiful garden and the surrounding glorious countryside looked brown and parched.

Wed/Thurs: the Bega locality

For the last two days we have explored the local area with Irene, wandering around shops in small towns and we've walked on some of the great beaches in the area. Today the grey skies have cleared making the gentle touring even more spectacular. We have enjoyed the wide open spaces, the big sky, we have watched kangaroos and enjoyed wondrous blue Agapanthus and Jackaranda trees.



As important a feature of these two days is the endless memories Irene has shared with Angela about her early life in Lancashire and family life here – of camping out in the bush by a lakeside with the family in early days and then



boating on the coast, starting with a dinghy and working their way up to a small cruiser. She and her husband, Brian – a teacher of Art, used to join a circus every year when school was out, their children joining them. She has also impressed us with her knowledge of the local birds and wildlife. She came into our room on the first morning to rescue a huge 2 - 3 inch Huntsman spider from the bedroom. Nick was annoyed that I'd made such a fuss and that it was removed before he could photograph it. The anemone was photographed in a rockpool on Pambula beach where there was also a rock formation that looked like Gulliver tied down on the sands.

Tonight we are going to supper with her family who live close by.

Friday ...and back to Melbourne

A bit of a family gathering last evening with Irene's daughter, Claire and her family. They live in an amazing old (and 100yrs old is old here!) Australian homestead that they bought north of Victoria and had transported to Bega in New South Wales. This necessitated the building being sliced down the middle and the two parts being trundled cross-country for 600km and finally up to a wonderful hillside location, with bush falling away to the river below. The driveway is lined with agapanthus,



painstakingly planted by Claire. The house has large, high, airy rooms, with lovely sash windows, is full of wonderfully 'dated' furniture, yesteryear memorabilia and is enclosed by a beautifully broad veranda which has just recently been completed. Claire is a bit of a Mrs Dolittle MD and

nurtures all the animals (lots of wallabies) and birds which inhabit the place, particularly a one-eyed, one-legged ancient parrot which she defends from predators! One large owl, mistakenly did a khamakazi attack when dear polly was safe inside, and crashed into the window rendering it unconscious for a while! Serves it right!



Today we headed back westerly and because we stayed on for last night's supper we did the 600km in one hit – not too painful

when you have three drivers. Apart from a little drizzle early on it has been a lovely day with blue skies and soaring temperatures and Irene's picnic was fully appreciated.