

November 2019

Dear All

Broken Hill looked to be the biggest place we had seen since Sydney. We drove in on Argent Street and passed Iodide, Bromide, Oxide, then Talc and Gypsum and Copper Streets. They are obviously very keen on their minerals and chemicals, not surprisingly as the mines are the reason for the city's success, even its existence.

First on our list was a motel. The visitor's centre was closed but supposedly it had a 24-hour display. It did, a screen in the window with a keypad



attached to the window, but it only displayed a table of information for a couple of seconds before switching from motels to restaurants to attractions. We had to take a photo and then squint at the camera display to find the address of a motel. The Desert Sands sounded good, just a couple of streets away, and it turned out fine.

Because of its far western location in the state, Broken Hill has more commercial contact with Adelaide in South Australia than it did with Sydney, so it observes South Australia time, half an hour behind what we were used to. We got confused at times but luckily it didn't matter.

I found a nearby restaurant, Mr Pickwick's in the old Willyama Inn, that sounded like it might be cheaper with smaller meals; I was wrong on all counts but the teriyaki was good. Our last job for the day was to find the Coles supermarket and stock up on picnic supplies.



Friday November 15th

It was a sunny and warm morning and it seemed a shame to spend it indoors, but Sandie and I wanted to see the Albert Kersten Mining & Minerals Museum, also called the GeoCentre, located downtown in what used to be a warehouse for wines and spirits. It turned out to be one of the best museums we've been to. It told the story of how the ore-body was formed nearly 2 billion years by a succession of crushing and heating and cracking events. Interaction with hot fluids created rare minerals and crystals. The result was an enormous ore-body shaped like a boomerang perched on its ends. In our time, the top of the boomerang protruded from the plains as a "broken hill".

In the 1880s a boundary rider, patrolling a cattle station's fences, found what he thought was an ore of tin. He was wrong but that didn't matter as underneath it was the world's largest and richest silver, zinc, and lead deposits. Since then the "broken hill" has been mined away and some of the mines have closed, but others have opened along the "line of lode", the direction of the boomerang. On display was a 90 pound nugget of almost pure silver.



The museum showed hundreds of minerals organized by crystal type, photographs from early mining days, and the 20 pound 'silver tree' made for the boundary rider who'd become a very rich man.



Walking around a museum is tough on the back, but I think John and Edna enjoyed their morning.

Attached was a display of local art, definitely worth a look.



At the back of the building were some enormous mineral boulders and a miner's cottage, built from corrugated iron, the construction material of the British Empire.



It is very hot in summer, and freezing in winter, but cheap and easy to ship around the world as a flat pack.

Afterwards, we went to a local park for a picnic lunch and were joined by these friendly corellas.



For the afternoon we were heading out of town to the Living Desert reserve and the Broken Hill sculptures. We began with the dozen sculptures, located on a hilltop within the reserve. On her way up the hill Sandie discovered this interesting rock, full of crystals, and regretted that we hadn't brought a fork lift truck with us.



This view from the hilltop shows typical landscape in the area. The buildings of Broken Hill are in the far distance.



The sculptors came from around the world so although the sculptures are all on an Outback theme, the styles are quite different. The sculptures are grouped like this on the hilltop. Most have detail carvings on their surfaces. We followed the sculpture trail around the hilltop and these were the ones that caught my eye.



We moved on to the reserve's trails. This kangaroo was lounging in the shade, ignoring the humans. After tromping around the museum and the sculpture trail, John had no legs left so he and Edna sat in the shelter while Sandie and I climbed up the trail.



They didn't miss much as the plants had few flowers at that time of the year and we saw just a few birds and lizards. The plants were mainly acacias and mulgas and kerosenes, leathery and

spiny. My back wasn't doing so well either so we didn't walk all the trails. As shown in the picture this is difficult terrain. The views were quite good though, desolate perhaps but beautiful too.

We wanted to take a look at the mine site itself so we headed back into town and the Lone of Lode lookout and miners' memorial. The lookout is at the top of a gigantic pile of tailings that the locals refer to as a hill of mullock. The tailings divide the town and the GPS had us going part way around the hill and then a u-turn to go around the other side. We drove up to the top where we had a view of all of downtown Broken Hill.



The Miners' Memorial attempts to capture the narrow, dark, and damp environment of the mine's tunnels. It lists the

names and ages and dates and reasons for the miners' deaths on the job. As expected the older entries have reasons like "crushed:", "fell", and "rock fall". But the newest entries have a surprising number of "heart attacks" with victims in their teens and twenties; odd and a little suspicious'





There was a strange story about a terrorism incident during the First World War. It was a holiday and picnickers travelling on a train came to an ice cream cart and the two vendors waved a Turkish flag, pulled out guns, and opened fire killing four people. The men were Afghans, not Turks, and their actual motive was unclear, but it led to Turkish and German nationals being interned in Australia.



The memorial gave us a view of some of the original mining pits and mullock hills. The hill's summit was ringed with mining equipment, including this underground train.



It had been a long day. We drove up and down Argent Street looking for a regular restaurant but ended up at the Barrier Social Democratic Club, where an Indonesian chili stir fry went down very well. Along the way we found this Aborigine art project: a non-functional canoe carved from bloodroot.

The road north from Broken Hill leads only to Sturt National Park and some marginal 4wd tracks, and the southwestern route would take us into South Australia which had its own fire problems, so the plan for the morning was to head south towards the state of Victoria.



Saturday November 16th

We were off next morning, heading southeast on a very quiet road towards the little town of Menindee and Kinchega national park. We stopped at Stephens Creek for a stroll up the dry river bed. This area is famed for its red river gums, gnarled and twisted great trees that have a nasty tendency to drop massive branches with no warning. It's very scenic country, but not a good place to camp.



We took a side trip to one of the Menindee Lakes; I think it was Copi Hollow, where we found this tree full of corellas. Then we took another trip to a dam, which was sitting near dry on both sides. There were pelicans, cormorants, and spoonbills in the water, and a flotilla of coots in the watery mud.



All the water comes into the area from the Darling River and a complex management system allows it into selected lakes and into the pipeline which goes to Broken Hill; the city has no water of its own. We found a channel of the river and followed that, winding our way around the gums. Sandie captured this small patch of eucalyptus flowers.



Nearby is the Burke and Wills campsite. Back in the 1860s their expedition from Melbourne across the continent to the Gulf of



Carpentaria stopped here on its way north. They made it to the swamps around the Gulf but only one expedition member survived the return trip.



The drive through Kinchega along the Darling River was delightful, very scenic with even bigger red river gums, and plenty of kangaroos, pelicans, goats, and other wildlife. When we camped there back in 2004 we witnessed an almost continuous parade of pelicans passing our campsite. There were still plenty of pelicans around but they were mostly perching on downed trees in the river, and then exploding into action when they caught sight of me with my camera.



With so much wildlife around these sheep looked to be out of place, tourists perhaps. They were outnumbered by the kangaroos, which seemed to be everywhere, including right in front of us!





Eventually we had to call it a day and find a motel for the night. We knew that the next place, Pooncarrie,



only had one motel so there was a possibility that we'd have to drive on a few hours beyond to Mildura. The road looked to have a shiny skin on top but was broken up in places with patches of loose sand. The

skin's angle varied so we took off at times. There was plenty to see with kangaroos and sheep and stumpy tails and echidnas on the road. Then we came to an isolated patch of bitumen, smooth blacktop, for twenty miles or so, but we were back into the sand for the rest of the way.



We made it to Pooncarrie, population 166, after 7pm and were pleased to see the pub next door to the motel, as that meant there'd be someone there. Even better they had two rooms available and they were cheap. And the restaurant had just opened; we saw Mama wielding a giant skillet.

The rooms had all the necessary components but they looked like they dated from about the 1980s. The TVs were hung from the ceilings and looked like cubes; there was only one channel and the picture was too dark to see anyway. The floors swayed quite a bit and we decided to keep our distance from each other, so our weight was distributed. John thought they probably had a termite problem. Our room had three single beds so the motel's business was probably itinerant workers more often than tourists



It was Saturday night and the bar was full of drunks, friendly drunks luckily. We had to wait awhile for dinner but why disturb the tourists if they are busy drinking wine? Dinner was OK and nobody got sick.

Sunday November 17th

It was a sunny morning with a cold wind as we set off from the deserted motel and bar. We were going to spend our day at Mungo national park, off to our east.. We were taking the more remote northern route as it looked more interesting, and so it proved.

We saw this tiny figure in the middle of the road, but didn't know what it was. It looked to be struggling to get up and run, but then it fell over and was deathly still.



John got out of the car and picked the little figure up; we could see that it was a tiny kangaroo, so young that it didn't have any fur. It shouldn't be out of its mother's pouch yet, but there was no sign of Mama. I walked



the edges of the road but didn't find a body. The little joey was shivering, probably from the cold as it was 12C, and sneezing, but seemed uninjured. He was wrapped in Edna's sweater and popped into a shopping bag, a substitute for Mama's pouch. He wouldn't drink but licked water from Edna's fingers.

The plan was to take him to the park in the hope that the rangers could care for him. We just hoped that he would survive that long.



We were at least 100K from the administrative area. The roads in that area are quite good but even the smooth and hard sections are at odd angles and punctuated by craters of soft sand. It would take us at least two hours, plus time for woolly traffic jams like this one. Joey was getting bounced around but that's normal for kangaroos. He fell asleep a few times.



As well as flocks of sheep we met more wildlife along the way, more kangaroos, an eagle and numerous stumpy tails. At one point Edna was trying to get a clear picture of the eagle, but John couldn't move the car because a stumpy tail was in front of its tyres,

and she couldn't move as she had a kangaroo in her lap! Yes, it was an interesting route we'd chosen.



I'd wondered why the eagle was tolerating our presence so long and

realized why when I looked at my pictures. Its tail had few feathers and it could not fly properly. It probably needed to go to a rehab centre too but I don't think any of us was going to volunteer to travel with an eagle on our lap!



Eventually we could see a line of white cliffs above the otherwise flat plain. This was probably part of Mungo's Walls of China, sand dunes formed when the lakes dried up and the sediments were blown away.

The park's visitor's centre was empty of rangers; most of them were off in other parks fighting fires. Eventually we found the Mungo Lodge, and Joey was passed to Sandie while John and Edna went looking for help. A bus was unloading guests to the lodge and Sandie spotted a lady with a parks badge, and asked if she could help us. I'd feared that we might be told to take him back to where we'd found him and let nature take its course. But this lady was obviously delighted to have us bring in a little orphan to be cared for.

We were taken into her office and she fed Joey with water from an eye dropper. He was then sucking on Edna's sweater where the water had spilled. She explained what they usually do with orphans. He'd be transferred to a bag of theirs, fed with water and goat's milk, and given to their bus driver to take him into town to a lady who'd care for him until he was old enough to be returned to the wild.

She said he was a western grey kangaroo and about a month old, perhaps the youngest they'd had brought in but he seemed to be well and uninjured so his chances were good. We had the option of driving him there ourselves but we wanted to see the park and needed to find somewhere to sleep. With some reluctance the ladies handed Joey over and said their goodbyes. We celebrated his survival with coffee and scones.



As we left the lodge we saw one of the staff walking up and down with a tight little bundle held to her chest... Joey must be fretting.

We set off to explore the park and drive the scenic loop up into the Wall of China. We'd all been to Mungo before but John and Edna had not driven the loop road.

40000 years ago the lakes had water and this was a productive area supporting a sizable population. The skeletons of Mungo Man and Mungo Woman are famous as the earliest examples of cremation and the coating of dead bodies with red ochre. More recently the climate had changed and by 15000 years ago the lakes were mainly dry.



The dunes of the Wall of China have been heavily eroded, particularly in modern times when sheep were grazing the plant cover. This led to the discovery of the archaeological treasures, but also the creation of canyons and spires, a "Badlands" landscape.



We visited the remains of the sheep station: a homestead and a woolshed and water holes. They had some boom years here which led them to double the number of sheep, but there were also multi-year droughts and plagues of rabbits to deal with; not an easy life!



They dug out this pit at the homestead where they could go to escape the heat. The woolshed was built from corrugated iron and must have been unbearably hot in the summer.

After a picnic up beyond the wall, we left a bit late as usual, with about 100 miles to drive to the Mildura area. The road was slow of course with the usual crazy angles and soft spots. We took the first motel we saw, the Edge in Buronga; we were just in time for dinner before the restaurant closed.

Monday November 18th

We came out in the morning to see that we had a flat tyre. We couldn't blame the poor roads as the offending screw could have been picked up anywhere. Neither of us could undo the wheel nuts so John called the RACV. Amazingly the guy showed up within five minutes; he'd been passing the motel when he got the call. Things would have been very different if the puncture had happened hours north of Mungo, away from cell coverage.

He had a more substantial wrench and quickly put



our spare on for us. We drove across the Murray River into Mildura in



the state of Victoria; luckily the tyre repair shop there was idle and happy to see a customer and we were soon on our way back across the river, which seemed to have plenty of water.

We headed upriver along the Sturt Highway towards Balranald and Yanga national park. Along the way we spotted Lake Benanee, a large lake well filled, a novelty after all the dry country we'd crossed.



Where there's water there are birds, mostly keeping their distance but we got to see this pair of kookaburras and a number of red-rumped parrots.

We stopped in Balranald

long enough to check into Balranald Motor Inn and then had the rest of the day to explore Yanga national park, once part of Yanga sheep station.



Our first stop was at the woolshed; this one was large enough to hold 3000 sheep during the shearing, mainly to keep them dry. I tried to imagine what it would be like to share that building with 3000 sheep on a wet day! Behind the shed were the living quarters, not too bad until we realized that each of the small rooms had beds for 8 workers. They must have used really poor concrete to construct the quarters as large chunks of the walls are missing.





The woolshed backs onto a landing on a bend in the Murrumbidgee River where the bales of wool were loaded onto steamers. When the shearers' knives could no longer be sharpened they would hurl them up into the tree at the landing, and we could still see a couple of knives protruding from the bark.

We moved on to the homestead, a few miles away. This was the family's home until 2005 when it was sold to the government as a museum with all the furniture and history intact. I didn't find the place all that interesting but it'll have more value to future generations. The museum closed while we were there but the staff let us stay until we were done. The garden had some attractive plants, including these lupine-like flowers.



We tried a road that looked interesting on the map but had little in the way of wildlife and scenery. We ate dinner back in Balranald at the Ex-Services Memorial Club; Chinese again, this time Szechwan lamb.



Tuesday November 19th

I'd thought to visit Murrumbidgee national park, only 80 miles or so away, but the forecast for the area

was for 41C, about 105F. We were also running out of clean clothes so we decided to head south and make our way back to Melbourne, staying overnight at Echuca, about halfway. Along the way we stopped at Lake Boga to look at the restored Catalina flying boat, but admission had been priced beyond what the casual visitor would be willing to pay.

We followed the south bank of the Murray, with the intention of stopping off wherever there were wetlands and backwaters and nature reserves. The Murray winds through some beautiful woodlands, as shown above.





We found some wetlands and walked to a bird hide giving us a view of what they called an ibis tree, but the current occupants were spoonbills. There was also a good mix of other water birds. We followed a few side roads which took us nowhere worth stopping for, except this herd of cows being moved by a very skilled dog.



We passed through Kerang where Carolyn used to work and arrived in Echuca in late afternoon. We checked in at the Echuca Motel, a place John and Edna had stayed at before.



We walked around Echuca Wharf admiring ancient machinery, a locomotive, and numerous old paddleboats. Echuca used to be the country's major inland port, the closest place on the Murray River to Melbourne, but today it is just a pleasant and interesting tourist town with plenty of old buildings and restored machinery.



This family of ducks were out on the lawn, with Mama Duck teaching her ducklings how to prosper from the tourists.



We drove over the river bridge to Moama in NSW to eat at the Bowling Club but the place was very busy with a table wait of an hour or more, so we came back to Echuca and found the Royal Hotel, where Tuesday night was *Parmi Night*. *Parmi* is the Australian rendition of chicken parmigiana; in this case about a dozen meals with different meats and cheeses.

Echuca's forecast for Wednesday was 44C, about 112F. South Australia already had that weather and the resultant catastrophic fire conditions. We would be leaving the Murray behind and following the Goulburn River towards Melbourne.



Wednesday November 20th
This was to be our last day of this road trip. We stopped at a couple of river crossings and then came to the John Cummins nature park, an extensive backwater area around the Yea River. It was home to a wide



variety of birds: ibis, herons, wrens, kookaburras.

John rested at the picnic area while the rest of us walked the trail, or tried to; there were more forks in the trail than the map suggested. We'd seen snake warnings, but with the dappled light through the trees it was hard to see what was on the ground. We were almost back when Sandie shouted



"Snake!" and I froze in midstep. She said that I'd stepped over the snake without touching it; surprising as I don't raise my feet far these days. Edna said it was an eastern brown. I never saw it as it disappeared behind a log and no one got a picture. The eastern brown is the second most poisonous snake in the world after the taipan. Survival time after a bite may be only a few minutes. That was my third close encounter with the species, so I've been lucky.

We'd planned to return to Melbourne via the Black Spur, a twisty road through a forest of enormous mountain ashes, but with the snake excitement we took the wrong road out of Yea. No matter as we'd been to the Black Spur before.

On our way into Melbourne we passed a small bush fire; it appeared to be under control. All was well at the house except for the electric front gate which refused to slide unless humans helped.

Thursday November 21st

The forecast was for 39C (102F), so we tried to get the work done in the morning. Edna and Sandie were doing the washing while John and I were cleaning up the back garden and pool. Despite the cover the pool had crud on the surface and bottom and algae in the water. Even with the cleanup we'd have to wait for the chlorine to take effect before we could swim. The temperature got to 41 before a storm with high winds and lots of rain swept through in midafternoon and it dropped to 18C (64F). Sandie barely emptied the washing line in time. The pool was full of crud again.

On the news Victoria had a mixture of fires and power cuts. Mildura, where we'd had the tyre fixed, had been blanketed by a dust storm. We hunkered down and veg'd. I was composing the story of the Saving of Mungo Joey for Facebook.

Friday November 22nd



It was a cooler day with a cold wind. We were going to Phillip Island, about 75 miles south of Mulgrave. Our route took us through Cranbourne, where Lynda and Phil used to live, and past the site of the Big Worm, a display of Gippsland's giant (up to ten feet long) earthworms. It's now closed



but the building, shaped like a worm, is still there.

We stopped just before the bridge to the island to watch the feeding of the pelicans. A kitchen worker comes out from one of the restaurants and tosses out fish remnants. The pelicans obviously know the schedules as they are already waiting. Sting rays came in around the pier too, maybe attracted by the activity.

We walked a trail in the woods around the Oswin Roberts Reserve in the hopes of spotting one of the koalas but there are thought to be only 40 left on the island out of the thousand that were there in the 1970s. We enjoyed the walk and saw wallabies and galahs and flowers but no koalas.





We had a picnic lunch at Rhyll on the shore, defending our food against the local gulls. This elaborate carving was nearby.



Then we were off to the Nobbies on the opposite side of the island. This is where the famous Penguin Parade takes place but not until it's almost



dark and the penguins feel that it's safe for them to walk up the beach to their burrows. We weren't staying that late so we drove the dirt roads around



the shore looking for penguin burrows and chicks. First we found these Cape Barren geese and an echidna that stayed above ground long enough for us to see its nose. We didn't want to damage any burrows so we just looked for those that were around the roads. These two burrows were typical; one with a chick keeping its eye on us and the other with two chicks squeezed within.



The visitor's centre is a blot on the landscape; they should never have put it right on the clifftop. We walked the trails below, finding more penguin chicks but most of these were in wooden nesting boxes.

Apart from the centre it's a scenic spot, with jagged rocks, crashing waves, and a blowhole. It's even prettier



when the pig face flowers are in bloom.



On our way back we stopped at Pyramid Rock where we found this snake.



It's called a copperhead, though it's unrelated to the American copperhead. It's supposed to be of medium toxicity for an Australian snake, "only" as poisonous as an Indian cobra.



Saturday November 23rd

It was a cool and still morning. John and I managed to get the pool and hot tub clean this time but the ladies weren't keen to use the tub.

We went out that afternoon to Jumping Creek on the Yarra River. We'd tried to go there in 2015 but the park had been closed because of the fire risk. This time it was open and we set off walking a trail along the river.



There were few birds in sight but enough flowers to keep Sandie happy. The trail turned out to be more hilly and rougher than expected so that we were relieved when we came to a blockage of the trail and had an excuse to turn around.



The next day we were setting off for a trip to the Grampian Mountains. The plan was to visit the national park and then come back along the Great Ocean Road. John and Edna had once stayed in a good motel near the park in Stawell, so I booked us in there for two nights.

Sunday November 24th

We had a warm and sunny start as we made our way across Melbourne and took the motorway west, the route towards Adelaide. We've driven the route twice before and it now has a lot more of the motorway sections completed.

Along the way we spotted Santa's sleigh with his team of kangaroos!



We stopped for lunch at Mount Buangor, a state park protecting an area of forested mountain scenery. Given that the national parks are managed by the states it seems odd to have state parks too, but I guess the states can allow dogs or hunting in the state parks if they want to. It was a pretty park, as shown below, but we didn't try any of the mountain trails.



We checked in at the motel in Stawell. The manager was a young Vietnamese lady; she was fascinated to hear that all of John's immediate neighbours are Vietnamese too. I don't think John's picked up the language yet though. The rooms were good but a bit noisy with the traffic on the main road.

We drove to the Rose Gap Road and turned into the park and drove close to Hollow Mountain, which is just that, a mountain with a high cavern and windows that look out on the surroundings. The other mountains around seem to have the same kind of erosion, lots of holes.

We hiked to Beehive Falls. John remembered it as a short hike, but perhaps the parking lot had been moved as the walk was about a mile



and the last section was steep and difficult, tough on John.

The area around the falls was pretty with rocks and shrubs



around a pool

but the flow wasn't much more than a dribble.

The area seemed to have had some rain though; there were plenty of different flowers along the trail.



We ate dinner at the Hong Kong Chinese/Malaysian restaurant. Too late we



discovered that it was BYOB and we didn't have a B to bring, but the food was good. On our way back we found the town's park and lake and a healthy population of ducks and black swans.



Monday November 25th

We had a cold night but a sunny warm morning. We were going back to the same area of the park but John wanted to take a look at Lake Lonsdale first. It proved to be an interesting spot with plenty of birds and an echidna and lots of free campsites.



There were stilts and sandpipers in the shallows and kookaburras and bee eaters in the trees. We'd all seen bee eaters in the tropics but were surprised to see them this far south.

We wandered the park's roads enjoying the rugged scenery. We found our way through

Zumsteins, once a holiday resort, to the trail for Mackenzie Falls, a large falls with plenty of water in a spectacular setting. We decided the hike to the bottom was too much for us and we settled for the overlook which also

proved to be a great place to see the local wildflowers.



We drove to the clifftop balconies that overlook the town of Halls Gap. The view was great, stretching as far as the morning's lake, but the experience was spoiled for Sandie by the idiots who just had to pose on the rocks overhanging thin air.



The Hong Kong was closed on Mondays, as were most other restaurants, so we had to search a little to find the Brix Hotel bistro, which advertised lunches and teas. We were looking for teas I guess and they summoned up a couple of parma chickens. The service was good; we were their only customers.



Our motel room was breezy as well as cold and we realized the windows were wide open behind the curtains. The room was quieter too with the windows closed!



Tuesday November 26th
It was cold, wet, and windy as we drove to Halls Gap to do a little shopping and get some postcards for the grandchildren. We were heading south through Dunkeld and Koroit to Tower Hill, an inactive volcano that's now a state game reserve. While it was active it was a maar volcano, experiencing multiple explosions when lava entered the lakes in the crater. From our previous visits we knew it was a reliable



place to find koala bears.

We met our first koala on the entrance road, a mama with baby. Unfortunately they were hard to see, directly above us, and we kept going back to see if they'd moved to a more convenient spot. But they didn't move much.

Tower Hill is also home to emus. Unfortunately, people like this guy feed them, with inevitable results. These emus invited themselves to our picnic lunch and had to be repelled.

Emus can be very pushy when they are hungry.





The lake was busy with coots and black swans; black swan cygnets are grey, just like white swan cygnets.



We were going to stay the night in Warrnambool, the nearest big town. The visitor's centre found us a place for the night for \$200. It turned out to be a two story house, with 4 bedrooms, 2 ½ bathrooms, a kitchen and living room with dining for eight, a patio, balcony, and garage. In the off-season, I guess, low rent is better than no rent.

We drove to an RSL servicemen's club on the seafront road for dinner and we enjoyed our bangers and mash.



islands, stacks, and arches. We began at the Bay of Islands, where we also found these flowers. I remember them from an earlier trip, but don't know what they are.

Nearby is the London Arch. It was called London Bridge until a few years before our first visit, when one of its arches collapsed into the sea.

Sandie and I walked the Lava Tongue trail, a boardwalk across one of the lake's wetlands and we found another koala family, a little easier to see. Koalas are nocturnal so they are mostly asleep during the day, waking up and moving about in late afternoon.



Wednesday November 27th

We had another cool and windy morning, and it stayed windy all day. We were going to drive along the Great Ocean Road, stopping at some of the coastal overlooks. Erosion of the limestone cliffs has resulted in the creation of





After lunch in Port Campbell we visited Loch Ard, another spectacular overlook. It has a great beach and cave too but John and I were hurting and didn't risk the steep walk down (and up). We bypassed the Twelve Apostles overlook too but mainly because it's very crowded, the destination for dozens of bus tours. There were only ever eight stacks and now there are seven, so those bus passengers must feel cheated.

We were going to take a side road down to Cape Otway to look for koalas, but got confused and thought we'd missed the road, so we covered

some of the main road twice, but on our second pass we found a koala in plain sight and then another, more active, taking this leap between trees.

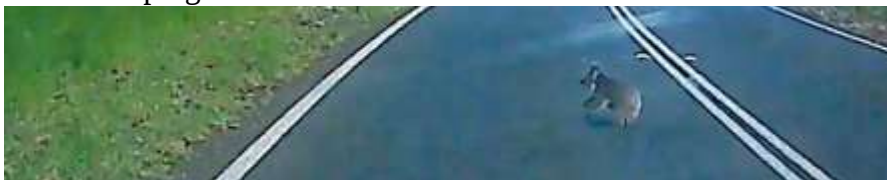


There were lots more on the side road, though not always easy to see. We found a safe place to pull off and could hear a male koala grunting. Nearby was a family with a very active youngster which left its mother and climbed high into the trees amongst tiny branches being thrashed by the wind. It looked terribly dangerous.





At the end of the road the lighthouse had already closed for the day, but I took the short trail to the overlook only to find that it was almost all steps and only the top of the lighthouse could be seen anyway. Back on the road the youngster was still climbing from branch to branch keeping the humans entertained.



We had another koala cross the road in front of us and it was captured on the car's dashcam. A lot of them die while crossing roads; this one was lucky to be missed by oncoming traffic.

It was getting late when we arrived in Apollo Bay and the first few motels we tried had no vacancies. The Beachfront Motel had two rooms left, not cheap but we were getting desperate. Apollo Bay is a popular spot; it's where Robert and Amanda take the family for their Christmas vacation.

We found we had a choice of three restaurants, all Chinese. The one we picked had all Asian customers too, with staff that struggled with English. The food was good, though Sandie and I discovered that the three-chili marking alongside the menu listing for our lamb stirfry was a serious warning!



Thursday November 28th (Thanksgiving in the USA)

The morning was cold and drizzly but at least the wind had dropped. We saw another koala along the way' looking a bit hung over, and then we were driving along the edge of the ocean, slow but scenic. The "fishing rod" on the left is dangling a worker who's scaling the rocks above the road.



I don't remember where I saw this Grampians grevillea, but I thought it pretty enough to include here.



In Lorne we drove up into the hills behind the town to Erskine Falls, a very pretty waterfall with plenty of water. Nobody else wanted to walk down through the jungle of ferns to the bottom of the falls in the rain. I found the steps to be too large for comfort though coming back up was easier

than the descent.



We found another koala and baby on our way back down the access road. She didn't look pleased to see us.

We had lunch at a little place in Anglesey, not much more than a corridor between two

buildings. The sandwiches were good but it was a chilly spot, not quite indoors.

John took us to Bells Beach, famous as one of Australia's best surfing beaches, but there was no wind and no swell so no surfing.



We stopped for coffee at Torquay Beach, where this wattle bird joined us. Sandie decided to feed the birds and in no time had dozens of seagulls in attendance. Well it's not as bad as feeding the emus!



We reluctantly left the beach and joined the heavy traffic for the long

drag through industrial Geelong into Melbourne. By the time we were crawling out of the city towards Mulgrave the sun had come out and the day had warmed up.

All was OK in Mulgrave though the sliding gate still needed some repairs.

Friday November 29th

John and Edna took Sandie to a quilt shop in Boronia in the morning. We'd hoped to meet up with Robert and family in the afternoon, but he was off in Queensland for a boys' weekend, and the girls were busy too.





Sandie wanted to see some more parrots so I suggested Kallista and Sherwood Forest, where there's a tradition of tourists feeding the parrots. We



found plenty of cockatoos but just a few parrots, crimson rosellas.

We walked partway along the Lyrebird Trail through the forest of towering mountain ash and a dense understory of ferns. We heard more birds than we saw. We retreated when the rain came. We stopped at



Lysterfield Lake where we found purple swamp hens and corellas and guinea fowl.





Then we moved on to Cardinia, site of one of Melbourne's reservoirs but also home to mobs of kangaroos. We didn't see as many as on our last visit but those we did see were very active, bounding around us.



A bonus though was finding this browsing wombat, our only one of the trip. Wombats are largely nocturnal and live in burrows so they are hard to see. They are like pigs with an armoured skeleton and they are easy to hit while driving at night, often fatal to both the wombat and the car.



The rain intensified by evening and John heroically cooked us a barbecue while we stayed dry indoors.

Saturday November 30th

John and Edna took us to the airport on a drizzly morning. On a Saturday there was little city traffic but the airport was clogged and they had to drop us off and we had to say our goodbyes in a hurry.

All went smoothly and we took off a little late around noon. 15 hours in a seat was just as painful as we expected, both with backaches and me with shooting pains in my leg so neither of us got much sleep.

We arrived in Vancouver the same day at around 7.30 am. It was a sunny morning but cool at -5C, (about 23F), and the parking lot ice-covered. I managed to stay awake for the drive home, via Chilliwack for some groceries.

We arrived in Hope at noon, the same day and time we'd left Melbourne. Since our takeoff, noon had been traveling west around the world at the speed of time while we'd been traveling northeast at less than the speed of sound and we'd met up with noon in Hope. Yes, hurts the head doesn't it?

The house looked OK and the yard too. Either there had been little wind or someone had cleaned up for us. Sandie started the washing and I finished off the Christmas card I'd started in October and I began the 2020 calendars. I stayed awake until near midnight and for once managed to defeat the jet lag.

On Sunday it was snowing steadily so we didn't venture out. I booked our flights for Christmas in Minnesota and New Year's in Okotoks, and settled down to turn my notes into this journal.

So how did the trip work out? We knew it was going to be very different from our previous trips to Australia, which had all involved mostly camping, usually in national parks but often just in some isolated spot in the wild. Staying in motels just doesn't have the same appeal; more comfortable usually, but concrete and Internet don't measure up to the Australian bush and its wildlife. In addition, the novelty of eating in restaurants soon wears off under the onslaught of too much food.

On the upside though, moteling allowed us to share the trip with John and Edna, something we couldn't easily do with our two-seater Troopy camper. It was also a safer option. One of the problems of having a camper that can go anywhere is that you get tempted to take risks, even if you no longer have the ability to get yourself out of trouble!

Our trip was partly to visit family and partly to revisit the east coast forests, a part of Australia we wanted to see again. The family part worked out well, thanks to everyone who helped make it happen. We never got to the forests, but that was probably good luck; if we'd been a week earlier we might have made it to the area and then got stuck in the smoke, or worse. We enjoyed our time in the desert areas even though it wasn't what we'd planned for.

We'd still like to have another try at the trip, but it's hard to predict when. Even if the fires went out now, very unlikely, it may be years before some of the parks can be reopened. The wildlife may not return in our lifetimes. And of course that's the other factor; we can't wait too long either!

Things have changed for the worse since our return. John and Edna were in Sydney with Carolyn over New Year's when the area clocked 48.9C (120F). The fires in NSW and Queensland have grown and Victoria's Gippsland area, just to the north of Lakes Entrance, has enormous fires now too. Phil and Lynda are staying in Melbourne and hoping that their house survives. Phil had a recurrence of the kidney stones and spent Christmas in hospital.

We wish everyone in Australia a better year in 2020.