

Rooming with 'roos in Australia's wild west

See Sydney by Yamaha, Bindi by tractor

By STEPHEN FROST
Herald Staff Writer

I arrived in the "big apple" of Australia - Sydney - April 23 with the intention of visiting my friend, Denys.

When I arrived, it was too late to search for him especially since I was coming into the city blind and obviously didn't know my way around. Tomorrow would be soon enough to find him, so I decided to spend the night in a youth hostel.

At the airport in Sydney there is no public transportation into town, so you have to depend on the privately-run bus companies that enter the city. The one I managed to catch was run by two Greek brothers who didn't know much English but said they knew of a youth hostel where I could stay.

It was a great place, right in the heart of King's Cross, which is to Sydney, for those who don't know, like Soho is to London or Times Square is to New York. Great place, with ladies of the evening on every corner, as the two brothers pointed out to me after all their more respectable passengers left, and other strange, assorted, wild and wonderful people.

I found myself at an overcrowded hostel which had one bed left. Actually, it was a cot on top of a picnic table under a tin roof which happened to be on the way to the washrooms.

Around the World in 380 Days

Seventh in a series

Needless to say, I didn't get a lot of sleep, but the excitement of being in a new country probably caused that more than anything else.

The next day I found Denys in one of Sydney's many suburbs and he graciously put me up for the week I was there.

That day, I went out and bought seven different types of Australia's famous beers. I must report here that for the most part I was disappointed. There were two very palatable brands, but the rest were very mediocre. As for the myth that Australian beer is very strong, don't believe it; in an article I read, which gave the alcohol content of 43 different beers, not one was over 4.7 per cent.

YAMAHA TOUR

During the week, Denys and I toured Sydney on his 750 Yamaha, and I must say that I was always a little leary of climbing on the back of his bike. He drove incredibly fast and in some ways quite reck-

lessly. Oh well, I survived a week of it and it somehow prepared me for Bangkok, which has by far the world's worst drivers.

Denys' roommate, Xavier, was not only "good company but an excellent cook as well. The most memorable meal was one of fresh octopus cooked in a pot of boiling water with spices and vegetables and served on a bed of rice with an Australian bottle of white wine that was very dry and smooth.

Now I never thought I would find myself eating something as physically repulsive as octopus, but it was one of the most enjoyable meals I had on the trip. Possibly because Xavier was such a good cook.

Overall, I liked Sydney on my first visit (I hadn't seen beautiful Perth) and my general impression was that it is a slightly British version of California.

That's one of the most curious things about the world we

live in today: it doesn't matter where you go, people are always trying to emulate the United States in their way of life, even though they may dislike Americans as a people. John and I found this in Tahiti, and Australia especially, and later in many other countries. In many ways Australia is New Zealand's counterpart of our neighbor to the South.

At any rate, after an enjoyable week in Sydney, it was off to Perth, where I was to find out where and for whom I was to be working.

Perth is by far Australia's most beautiful city, as well as its most hospitable city. When I landed there April 27, it was the beginning of their winter; the Saturday and the Sunday were both 80 degree days on the old Fahrenheit scale. I spent the weekend on the beach body surfing in the clear waters of the Indian Ocean.

BEST EATS

John had flown into Perth from Christchurch the day before, so he had already figured the city out and where the best places were to eat. They certainly weren't at the hotel where the company which hired us put us up.

I soon learned I was off to Ingloona farm near the small village (one store and a tiny town hall), called Bindi-Bindi. A bus ride of about 100 miles got me there and I lodged with

the farm manager, Brian Butler. Brian ran this "small farm", which was 6,000 acres. It was about ten miles away from the main farm, called St. Leonard's, which was owned by Irwin Barret-Leonard, a class workaholic. The main farm was a "mere" 20,000 acres.

I didn't live with the Butlers in their house, but rather in one of the farm's old sheds. It had a tin roof with a drop ceiling and a wooden floor that hadn't seen a broom in years. It also had a small, open stove to heat the room on cold nights.

The bathroom was nothing short of primitive. To get hot water in the shower, I had to burn newspapers in a heating apparatus through which the water passed and hopefully got hot. To get a shower, I usually had to stoke it twice.

I shared this humble abode with a large number of mice, the odd kangaroo (there were a score of them in the woods nearby) and a rooster that insisted on crowing at four every morning. I hated that bird.

WEEK'S WORK

For a short week's work (days of 10 hours, five on Saturday) I received \$120, while for a week of 72 hours I was paid \$200.

Often at the start of a job like this, I got depressed because I had been travelling freely and all of a sudden I was tied down for at least two months. You realize suddenly that you have eight to nine weeks of work before you can take off again and be your free and irresponsible self, so to speak. Once I settled in, however, it wasn't bad at all; in fact, I rather enjoyed it.

Farming wheat in western Australia is a tricky business at best. The area gets roughly 11 to 14 inches of rain a year and this generally comes in the months April through June; or at least the farmers hope it does.

When the rains come, you have to work like hell to get the wheat and barley in the ground. The farmer I worked with sowed more than 11,000 acres of grain in a little over



This is a typical view from the top of a windmill on St. Leonard's farm in western Australia. The author often took his camera along to catch views like this. (Herald photo by Steve Frost)

ride down to Perth. Next week, I'll talk about Perth in more detail and describe some of the bus trips John and I took around Australia.

We did this by working the machinery, John Deeres and a big Acre Master (320-horsepower diesel) around the clock. My shift was from seven at night to seven in the morning. The best night I had with the 160-horse power John Deere was 135 acres of wheat sown. That was low compared to what some of the more experienced hands were doing. The largest field I planted was 500 acres.

Mr. Leonard fertilized the fields twice, once with trucks before the planting and the second time fertilizer was sown with the seed.

A typical yield for him was between 20 and 25 bushels per acre, which by Canadian standards is very low. But then you've got to see the conditions in which these farmers have to farm.

After five weeks on the nightshift, I was glad to see the end of seeding. I stayed on one more week drenching and vaccinating sheep (my favorite animal) and caught a truck

The Sydney Opera House is often likened to a big clam or oyster and this view of it shows why. It's Sydney's single most important building as far as sightseeing tourists are concerned. (Herald photo by Steve Frost)

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Halton Hills planning director Mario Venditti, in charge of local municipal planning since 1973, surveys some of the many subdivision plans on file at his Guelphview Square offices. (Photo by Tim Tolton)

Town planner Mario Venditti built department from scratch

By TIM TOLTON
Herald Special

As recently as 1973, the former town of Georgetown soon to become part of Halton Hills, had no planning department whatsoever; it was at that time that Mario Venditti was hired as planning director and given the preliminary job of forming his own department.

The municipal planning department is unique within the local structure in that it serves purely in an advisory capacity.

"The main goal of the planning department is orderly and progressive growth for this community," Mr. Venditti explained recently.

This is the basic premise from which he and his staff work. In order to achieve orderly growth, the planner is responsible for all development in the community and therefore the preparation of policies that guide the physical, economic and social standpoint.

INFO CENTRE

The department serves as an information centre which assimilates and distributes information to concerned parties. Companies interested in moving to Halton Hills contact

WHO RUNS HALTON HILLS?

A look at our civic officials

Second in a series

Mr. Venditti, who then provides all the necessary information.

The planner advises town council on all matters concerning land use and is often involved in preparing reports for bodies like the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the provincial ministry of housing.

He represents the town's interests before the Ontario Municipal Board and provides liaison among the town, Halton region and the provincial government.

Least anyone think that the planner is always involved in governmental red tape, he also conducts meetings where information is passed on to the general public. When the recent Master Parks Plan was

completed; Mr. Venditti's department held public meetings at Gordon Alcott Arena to advise the citizens as to its contents.

SMALL TOWN

Mr. Venditti concedes that Halton Hills is "basically a residential community and is still a relatively small town with a slow to moderate growth rate."

He says that since the town would like to see more industry, it (industry) is given priority over residential development when policies are formulated.

When asked to comment on the apparent lack of a sense of community in Georgetown, Mr. Venditti disagreed. "There are some neighborhood areas in Georgetown, but

people tend to associate with the town as a whole because it is spread out and you have to go around to get what you want."

Mr. Venditti sees the Fairgrounds Park district, the Delrex subdivision, and the Moore Park areas as three distinct neighborhoods in Georgetown.

When asked why Georgetown has no "people" parks like Riverside Park in Guelph, he pointed out that there is "a shortfall in parks, and that's why the Master Parks Plan Study was done to identify these deficiencies." The current proposal is to develop the ravines surrounding Georgetown as open park systems.

Mr. Venditti says his job is rewarding because he feels he leaves behind something of a permanent nature.

"We plan the community and see it through," he notes.

Mr. Venditti graduated from York University with an Honours BA in 1971 and his Master's Degree in 1975. He worked part time for two Toronto-based development companies for two years before taking the job as planner in 1973. He is married and lives in Georgetown.

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald Special

While it took Japanese patience and ingenuity to develop a "made-in-Japan" worm, a surprising number of Ontario residents are cashing in on one of the newest forms of agriculture, raising bait worms.

Ted Hilton, of RR2, Acton, is a company representative as well as a worm farmer under contract to National Green Projects of Mississauga, the North American representative for National Nightcrawlers.

Mr. Hilton says the garage-full of wiggly fellows he nourishes are descended from a hybrid worm specially developed for the bait industry. Three species of African worms were crossed to produce one which is livelier than the common dew worm, lives 25 hours under water (an ordinary worm dies almost immediately in water), and can be stored at room temperature for up to a month, while other worms require refrigeration.

While fishworm farming may seem a rather odd part-time job to the uninitiated, Mr. Hilton points out that it can pay quite well for a relatively small initial investment and not too great a time commitment.

National Green Projects supplies a new farmer with eight pails, each containing 60 worms, as well as making the technology of the operation available to him for an \$850 investment.

New farmers have a three-month period in which to discover the quirks of their produce and decide if they want to go into production. If the company and the farmer are both satisfied, the company will offer a contract for one million worms a year to the farmer. The company has a market for two billion worms annually in the United States. Since the fishing season is year-round there, the market

is steady and the income guaranteed, Mr. Hilton says.

The company will accept up to 1,000 farmers before it closes the books and becomes a closed situation, similar to marketing boards in other forms of agriculture. Now there are about 730 farmers and a surprising number of them are near Toronto.

As a company representative, Mr. Hilton helps new farmers get started and also offers a drop-off point for farmers ready to ship worms to the parent company in Mississauga.

Worms are clean, harmless, silent and don't crawl out of their pails, Mr. Hilton jokes. This makes them perfect for people living in town as well as farmers who want to supplement their cash crops. Worm castings (manure) is among the most potent types of fertilizer available and is also odorless. This makes it easy to store and greenhouses and nurseries are quite happy to buy it.

The worms are fed a mixture of peat loam, dried cow manure, shredded newspaper, and a special grain and vitamin mixture.

Each worm lays about two eggs in two weeks. Each egg contains two or three young. A month after they hatch, the worms are big enough to be sifted from the soil and castings onto mechanized screens. Once they are 120 days old, they are mature enough to sell as bait worms. It takes eight to nine months to build up sufficient breeding stock from the initial eight pails of worms to become self-sufficient and begin marketing the worms, Mr. Hilton says.

At an average price of five and a half cents each, a farmer can look to an income of \$15,000 to \$40,000 annually, depending on how much effort and how big an operation he wants to go into.

A worm farm only requires

400 to 500 square feet of space, which can be maintained at a constant 72 to 76 degrees

Fahrenheit. Since the Canadian bait industry only has season needs

the Japanese worm is only just beginning to be appreciated here, Mr. Hilton says.



RR2 Acton worm farmer Ted Hilton is seen emptying a tray of worms onto a home-made screening machine belt which deposits the worms on a top screen, eggs on the second level and castings in a box below. In the lower corner, Dorothy Hilton can be seen collecting the worms and eggs in separate buckets. The inset shows Mr. Hilton with a sample of his "made in Japan" worms. (Guelph Mercury photo)