

Bouncing by bus across Nullabor

Around the World in 380 Days

Eighth in a series



By STEPHEN FROST
Herald Special

On my second stay in Perth, the city began to rival Christchurch in New Zealand as my all-time favorite city.

John Pladdy, my travelling companion, had an extra week's work on his hands, so I was free to run around the Perth-Freemantle area as much as I liked.

The nightlife was excellent and restaurants abounded; one even advertised Canadian-broiled steak, whatever that means.

Perth sits astride an estuary and has beautiful King's Park at its southern end, affording a beautiful view of the city.

Speaking of beautiful views, when John and I were there, we were walking in the park one afternoon when we

stumbled across a public relations promo for the 1979 Miss Universe Contest. All the gorgeous contestants were there and I must say I have never before seen such a collection of legs, among other things, in my life.

As for J.P., he decided he was going to clean his act up somewhat and disappeared one afternoon for a haircut. Turns out it was the most radical thing he had done in ages. He had not only gotten his head shaved dramatically, (it rivaled a punk rocker's) but he had also shaved off his mustache and sideburns with the intention of growing a beard.

I told him he might begin to look alright in a month or two. In Perth, J.P. and I bought Aussie Fassas, which allowed us unlimited travel for two

months for \$326 Australian. It turned out to be one of the best values in the country.

NULLABOR PLAIN

The first leg of our journey saw us leave Perth late one evening heading for Adelaide. The highway crosses the Nullabor Plain. The word nullabor means treeless and it's just that; it's like desert in the south western states, but goes on forever, or so it seems.

Along the way, we could see dozens of abandoned, burned-out cars at the side of the highway.

It seems that if your car breaks down on the Nullabor, you have two choices: either leave it and look for help at the nearest garage (we saw two in 36 hours of travel) or burn it and collect the insurance.

Most people choose the latter, because if you can somehow find help, it may still take a week to get mobile. By then you would be lucky to have any parts left on the car at all, let alone tires, so your chances of ever driving it again are very remote.

Adelaide was at the end of that long trip, two nights and a day on the bus, and John and I were both glad to see it. We didn't spend too long here, just long enough to go on a tour of the Bourassa Valley.

The Bourassa is Australia's premier wine district, where some of the wineries date back 150 years. We spent the day banging around from place to place sampling wares and I must say it was one of the most pleasant days I had had in a long time. Australian wine is surprisingly good and promises to get better.

ONTO SYDNEY

From Adelaide, we went up to Melbourne, where we spent a day. The city is very grey and dull in the winter - and from there on to Sydney.

We tried to get in touch with Denys, our crazy French buddy, but he had sold his motorcycle and left for North America. I keep expecting to hear from him every day, but it's been a year since he left Australia.

By this time, John and I were anxious to get up to Cairns, where we could get out to the Great Barrier Reef and spend some days lazing in the sun.

This was to be the beginning of our five months sultan time. The unfortunate part about it was that it was still another 47 hours away by bus. We did the trip in two segments, going to Brisbane and staying overnight and from there to Cairns.

I haven't said much about these buses we travelled on, but needless to say they are much like many other long-distance buses, moderately comfortable for the first five hours and hell after that, unless you manage to grab two seats for a bit of shut-eye.

However, the trip wasn't without its comic moments. Between Sydney and Brisbane, John and I had the misfortune to be seated behind a miserable old shrew of a woman and her moronic

husband. The whole of the daylight part of the journey revolved around her complaints about how uncomfortable buses are and getting her henpecked husband to adjust his seat forward or backward, depending on which side of the bus offered the better view.

She then provided the highlight of the trip by getting her lovely person locked in the bathroom at the rear of the bus. She couldn't figure out that the locking mechanism had to be down for the door to release.

FIRST PEACE

Four or five people were gathered around the back of the bus trying to explain to the thick woman how to get out while her hubby, enjoying his first moment of peace in years, sat for a full five minutes with a smile on his face. In the meantime, his wife was having her portly body lunge from side to side in the stinky old loo on a rockin' and rollin' bus. I'm sure the driver took the turn and bends a little sharper and faster at this point.

The day we arrived in Cairns, it was a balmy 86 degrees on the old trusty Fahrenheit scale and the weather promised to hold.

We spent a week here residing at the youth hostel on the waterfront and taking trips up the coast or inland to the plateau country on buses. In the evening, there were many pubs to choose from which served terrible beer or great white wine. Naturally, we drank the latter.

The best trip, however, was on a day excursion to Green Island on the Great Barrier Reef. We caught the early morning ferry out to the island, which is rather commercial unfortunately, but has great snorkeling if you know where to look. Most people don't, and we were just lucky when we found the right spot after swimming around in the shallow water off shore.

On the opposite side of the island, there is what appears to be a long breakwater running diagonally away from shore to the east. It isn't a breakwater, but dried-up coral. It's a quarter of a mile out to the reef, walking on sharp coral, but it is well worth it.

The reef drops off from four to ten feet for a while, then disappears into the depths. Never in my life have I seen so much coral and variety in the fish and coral that surrounded us. "Incredible," we kept spitting, there was even a giant clam or two, one of them three feet in diameter with its insides a brilliant purple with white dots.

We also acquired fine sunburns in the process, which John managed to turn into a tan. I just stayed my usual lobster red.

Next week I'll be talking about our trip inland to Ayer's Rock and Darwin, among other things. From Darwin, we ended up back in Perth and in a small amount of trouble for over-staying our visas. Nothing John couldn't handle with a little Welsh charm and a few lies.

Green Island, situated along the Great Barrier Reef some 20 miles off the coast of Queensland, Australia, can be reached by ferry from Cairns, as the author and his companions Dave Downing (left) and John Pladdy discovered during a snorkeling excursion.

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Alternatives workshops

HERALD SPECIAL

Efforts are being made to establish a centre for environmental alternatives in this area.

Dan Shatill, an environmental planner with the ministry of environment, and a group interested in alternatives have formed a body called the ATEED Centre for Environmental Communities.

With ATEED's knowledge and funding to back it, and Mr. Shatill's voluntary efforts to guide it, the centre for alternatives may be established as soon as a suitable property is found.

At a press conference in Hillsburgh Thursday Mr. Shatill said he was asked to take over a property near the village for the centre. But complications have arisen with the original proposition and now the project is homeless.

While attempting to organize the centre over the past 14 months, the group has grown to know and like the community. Mr. Shatill said he wants to keep the centre in Erin township.

Surveys or groups that will show consistent commitment, compatibility and contribution to this project.

The surveys, workshops and centre are aimed at serving the Hillsburgh area first, non-township residents will be welcome to join in, Mr. Shatill said. There will be a charge for the day and evening workshop sessions but the centre will kick-off their project 'sday evening with a free fire on solar houses for a climate at the school. The fire begins at 7:30 p.m.

SURVEYS

ATEED has received a government grant to employ five students through the summer. They will conduct blanket surveys of the township as one of the centre's projects.

The students will begin with a skills questionnaire. Residents will be asked to list any skills such as carpentry, beekeeping or organic gardening which they would be willing to teach others. After the survey is completed a catalogue will be compiled. Area residents may refer it to a find a resource person to teach them a new interest.

The second survey will be concerned energy awareness. A third concerning home insulation is expected to be lengthy and complex.

Each Saturday during the summer, the centre will sponsor a workshop at Hillsburgh's Ross MacKay Public School on a variety of topics such as home renovation, cheap heating methods, solar air systems green houses, hydroponics, composting, organic gardening and wind architectural considerations in designing new homes.

PROPER HOME

If a proper home can be found for the centre Mr. Shatill said it can be used to demonstrate a range of technologies and give interested people experience.

"While ATEED is the initiator of the centre," Mr. Shatill said, "we intend within the next two years to establish a local management to be incorporated... with persons, orga-

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