

# Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

Australia, where desert and civilisation meet up



## Chapter 10 A

October 2004 - October 2005

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On our way from Canada to Australia, we would have loved to visit several Micronesian islands. We had made reservation for about a dozen island-hopping flights on Oct. 14th, but unfortunately the next day Palau Micronesia Airways was not able to issue the tickets, as the flight from Palau to Darwin had suddenly been suspended. With some Good Luck, we could thereafter find a cheap ticket from Montreal to Melbourne directly.

On Oct. 27th, 2004 we got picked up at 05:30 h in the morning, to fly to Melbourne via **Los Angeles**. Already in Montreal, we went through US customs, after we had received the boarding-passes for our three flights end-destination Melbourne. We didn't get bored during the 11 hours we had to wait in Los Angeles for our connection flight. As US airports don't have transit areas, we could walk freely around the big building and even leave it. When making inquiries about flights to Micronesia at the desk of Continental Airways, we got to talk to a very nice lady. She had been there herself and she spontaneously called in some other staff that came from Guam and Samoa. We stood there, talking for more than an hour and later had some light snacks as we had had before.

On the 14 hours non-stop flight to Sydney, United Airlines crossed the dateline and so we lost one precious holiday... Even though our tickets had cost less than € 600, we could sit in the "economy plus" section with extra legroom and the service was very humorous and good. After another hour's flight, we arrived in **Melbourne** on October 29, 2004.

## The red continents East:

### We visit cities, national parks and naturist grounds

Here our new  **Australian** adventure could begin! It's already the third time that we come to see this beautiful country after previous visits in 1987 and 1992 and we loved to come from the Canadian autumn directly into Australian spring, with no winter in between.

## Melbourne

By the time we landed in **Melbourne**, it was only 10 am and so we tried to get an onward flight to Tasmania immediately. However, it wasn't even possible to get on a stand-by list, as all the flights were booked out. As naive tourists, we weren't aware that this was the long weekend of the Melbourne-cup, a famous horse race that - believe it or not, blesses the entire province of Victoria with a public holiday on Tuesday. Therefore, part of the population that is not interested in this sport, just escape for a long weekend. So, we had to change our plan and rang a Backpacker's place to get a free pick-up from the airport. Soon we realized that Backpackers flood Australia in much bigger numbers than Canada and thus generate a whole industry. Here in Melbourne, these hostels can accommodate several thousand people and they run tours and travel agencies across the country. Often, the big hostels also have their own employment agencies and bars, so that those willing to work get the practical chance to spend the money right "in house". The so-called nightly parties aren't much more than "drink till you drop" at a fixed "all you can drink-price".





In our memory, the city had been a pretty quiet place, but today the streets were bustling with people enjoying the many outdoor cafe's, serving cappuccino and strong espresso, as well as a good selection of continental style cakes and breads. The most recent immigrants come from Asia and they also introduced a bustling restaurant scene with eateries in every price range. To us, it seemed that Asians integrated very quickly and smoothly, which might be because they follow the tolerant philosophy of Buddhism, which - unlike most of the world's religions - does not force its views onto anybody else.

We really liked the way this city looks now with many well-restored "turn of the century" Victorian style buildings nestled between modern high-rise glass towers. The newly pedestrianised walk along the Yarra River was very popular on Sunday and so was the beach-town of St. Kilda, only 10 km to the south. We were amazed about all these changes and secretly hoped the same improvements could be found all over the country - especially what concerned food - but soon thereafter, we realized, this was just an illusion...

## Tasmania

After 5 days in Melbourne, we could get on an A\$ 70 flight, down to the island province of **Tasmania**. [Hobart](#) lies nestled between a natural harbor and its surrounding hills. The city center was small with a charming atmosphere. During our 10 days the weather was mostly according to its reputation: cold, wet and sometimes foggy - at some days it was 9 °C cold. As the locals are used to this, most shops, restaurants and our hostel kept their doors constantly open. People would often sit outside and enjoy what they called romantically "al fresco dining" - grrrr, shiver shiver!

Initially, we looked for a car to buy, but soon we realized that they are quite expensive, most probably more than on the mainland. As the ten hours night-ferry didn't tempt us, we soon decided to take a rented car and then fly out again. We still learned something about Aussie cars and also met Beat on that way. He is a Swiss who immigrated Down Under twenty years ago. We got to talk to him for quite a while and so our discussions deviated from cars to personal subjects and he later took us on a tour around the area with his teenage children. This was our first introduction to the Tasmanian countryside. We particularly enjoyed it, as we didn't need to mingle with the traffic that - English might not agree - drives on the "wrong side" of the road here...

Later on when renting a car, we still needed enough concentration, as the gear stick and dashboard equipments were on the side opposite to what we were used to.

When going out on a discovery tour of the island, we were quite lucky with the weather, as the sun appeared for a few hours every day. The hills were green with sheep and cattle grazing, and with big eucalyptus, or gum trees everywhere. Driving up the east coast, we visited beautiful **Coles Bay** and **St. Helens**. We saw wonderful beaches, some of which had sand white as snow and in other places it was golden. No bathers around yet, as it was far too cold still. In various places the rocks on the water were covered in bright orange lichen contrasting wonderfully out of the blue and green waters. Up near St. Helens, there were some sand dunes and blow holes.

Turning inland, towards Launceston, we passed through a very nice area of rainforest with big mossy trees and tree fern.



**Launceston** was a very pretty little town with many beautiful old-fashioned houses. After another night in a hostel, we drove along highland-lakes into the mountains. It was drizzling, but as soon as we came up to higher altitudes, we drove into thick fog. That was a pity, as there were many special plants growing and we

could hardly see a thing. We would have liked to go to other mountains but with this fog, it was just not worthwhile and so we headed south to Bothwell, which was below the clouds. In this village we were being comforted as we got to taste some real good (yummy) and freshly made Aussie-pies, of the kind that probably made them famous but are so hard to find today.

## Adelaide

After another two days in Hobart, we took a plane that flew us all the way to [Adelaide](#). Everyone called it 'just a large country town' and it still looks pretty much the same as it did on our last visit. By mid November, Rundle Mall pedestrian area had been decorated for Christmas. When we went for a walk in the park along Torrens River, we saw a pelican patiently waiting next to some fishermen, there were black swans and in the trees there were parrots of various vivid colours shrieking very noisily.

Only now, temperatures rose above 20 degrees and we finally got a chance to wash our long sleeve jumpers and trousers. People started to wear light summer clothing, exposing often wobbly figures. It wasn't only the



big international fast-food chains that make big business here. No, here the same burger- and deep fried stuff is labeled "proudly Australian owned and operated" by small businesses that, however, do not serve any healthy food at all. To cover the needs of the second biggest nation after the US - in terms of overweight, we mean - even the most ordinary department store sells cloths in sizes XL up to 8XL (meaning: XXXXXXXXL) Sure, people try to fight their kilos, concentrating on artificial low-fat products, to calm their conscience, instead of avoiding their beloved greasy fish and chips or battered nuggets and burgers. The industry replies swiftly by advertising not only fat-free yogurt, but also: fruit jam, fruit-shakes or sorbet ice cream, as being 99%-100% fat-free! The 70% of sugar-content are not mentioned at all...

After checking out a 5 km stretch of car-yards (on foot) in North Adelaide, we answered an add that finally led to the purchase of our Aussie-car: a Toyota Camry sedan, 13 years old for A\$ 2'630 (€ 1'540). We had it inspected by a mechanic, who certified this car as being still in good condition, contrary to the one we had brought him the previous day from a car-dealer, to which he commented: "this is just a piece of shit, don't buy it!"

Now we called Zebet and Peter, an Australian couple we had met 12 years ago on a camping in the Nullarbor Plain and stayed since in contact with. During a dinner out, they invited us to spend a few days in their house. They spoiled us in every respect and took us to the Barossa Valley and the Adelaide hills. We were treated so generously, it was almost too hard to leave, but our feet were itchy and we were keen to start our adventure-tour with our newly polished shiny car.

## Victor Harbor

We and our witch were leaving Adelaide on November 24th, 2004. Brigitte named our 4 wheeled companion "witch" because of her number plate that reads VYJ 861 - just a shame; it does not run on witchcraft instead of relying on petrol.



Our luggage looked so tiny in the big booth, until we stopped by at that big shopping center, when this changed after we came out with some boxes for our kitchen-stuff plus some more camping gear.

We drove south along the Fleurieu Peninsula that was flanked by hills covered in dry grass that shone golden above the blue ocean. In **Victor Harbour**, we stayed overnight in a camping cabin. This was a small touristy place with a bridge connecting to a small granite island - for those who wished; by horse pulled carriage.

Along lonely roads, we drove through farmland around Alexandrina Lake, crossing the Murray River by ferryboat. This river was winding its way like a long green band through the hot and dry countryside. Before reaching Robe, the road passed by some beautiful salt-lakes.

## Naturist ground Sunland Holiday Village

We stayed for 5 days at **Sunland**, a naturist camping owned by an English expat couple. It was situated near the beach, 500 meters behind some very scenic sand dunes. At that time, it wasn't busy at all and therefore every evening lots of Kangaroos came in, grazing sometimes right in front of our on-site van. It seems that there would have been lots of wombats around, as the amount of new droppings every day was surprising. Unfortunately, we never could spot one of these animals the Aussies call "rocks on four legs". These marsupials are about the size of a small pig but rather look like a little bear, as they are very heavy (up to 30kg) and furry. They have their pouch opening towards their rear legs, as they dig big burrows into the ground to live in.

However, the specie we did encounter more often than desired, was the royal Australian fly. They tended to follow us in swarms and their favorite spots of landing were our eyes, mouth and nose. Some "only" rode on our backs, which was less annoying than those on our "sensitive parts". To get rid of them, we were constantly waving our hands, which is said to be the typical Australian greeting. The walk down to the beach was a real highlight, leading through bushland out across a dried up lake and over the sand dunes, the biggest of which was called "big Bertha". The colour of the water was astonishing in such a bright blue. We were the only ones at the beach, apart from some 4WD vehicle passing by on a Safari on Sunday. A month later, this would have been very different here; we were told that Sunland was fully booked for X-Mas /New Year, but for the moment neither the jacuzzi nor the sauna were heated in the clubhouse.

## Grampians Nationalpark

We continued 400 km northwards to Halls Gap in the middle of the **Grampians National Park**. As the first two Backpackers places were booked out, we tried our luck in a Bed and Breakfast, advertising on the road. As B&B's usually are very expensive in Australia (often they cost above \$100/€ 60), we were very pleased to get a room for \$ 50, the same price we would have paid for two dorm beds in a hostel. On the beginning, we were the only guests and Ray, the owner let us use his computer for hours. He was moving out after a few days, but

let us stay, so, when we had the whole house to ourselves, we liked it even more. The location of the lodging was among the gum trees and dozens of Kangaroos came grazing around the house daily. As our landlord used to feed the cockatoos and parrots, they came often as close as a pet, asking for seeds with their shriek voices.

Of course, we went out hiking to discover the wonders the ranges had to offer, one is even called "the wonderland range" and there were many spectacular lookouts to admire the view down to the valley and over some lakes. There were many stunning rock formations and plenty of waterfalls. In the end, we stayed much longer than we had intended to and so we met the two crazy girls from Melbourne that had booked a room for a week later.



## Great Ocean Road

We left the Grampians towards the coast to enjoy the beauty of the famous **Great Ocean Road**. Although it was misty and rainy at some places, it was wonderful to see this truly astonishing part of Australian coastline again. As this is one of the big "must see's", we found ourselves suddenly among flocks of overseas tourists that were also "view-point hopping" either by coach, rental car, bike or as we do: with a car purchased for their trip around the 5th continent. Millions of pictures are taken here every year of these countless sandstone formations that are merely just rocks left standing in front of the cliffs, the most famous group of them being called "the 12 Apostles"



## Again to Melbourne, thereafter to the interior

As the road led to **Melbourne**, we couldn't resist to visit this beautiful city again. It was just great to dive into this very lively blend of southern European and Asian culture once more, that had amazed us so much 5 weeks ago. We burnt lots of calories by exploring the city on foot, so we didn't need to have a bad conscience about savouring its culinary delights whenever we felt hungry. Apparently, a survey voted Melbourne and Vancouver as the two best towns to live worldwide. They both have striking similarities, especially with regards to its strong Asian influence. We are convinced this made all the difference. Twelve years ago, the Aussies were almost afraid to let too many immigrants from Asia in. But today, it is obvious, how much of economic- and cultural boost was injected by those immigrants from all over Asia.

After 4 days, we drove north to the gold mining town of **Bendigo**, which was a charming old town. Old for Aussie standard, since the gold rush started in 1860. There are still various mines being worked today, probably drilling out more gold than ever, but of course not with low scale methods as the first diggers had.

Only 1½ hours north, we reached **Echuca**, which once had Australia's largest inland port. Today, it's a little touristy town and instead of the cargo steamers, there are now many houseboats floating on the Murray River.

## Naturist-ground River Valley

We stayed twenty kilometers out of town at **River Valley Naturist Resort**. This was a very nice place on the knee of a river. It was the 15.12.04 and we were almost the only ones on the grounds, although the owners assured us, there would be 500 people by the end of the month. It seems that Australians seldom holiday between peak-seasons, except on long weekends and we wonder whether there would be more encouragement, if there would be a bigger difference between low- and high season-rates, as we noticed, there is often no difference at all, or if it comes high, up to 20%, not like in Europe, where it can be up to 500%.



We rented a caravan, who was in pretty good shape, but for tall people as us, the bed was far too small as in most caravans. As it was one of only two big commercial camps all over OZ (both are for sale by the way), they had about 25 rental units and lots of camping space, but all were cramped together too close we felt. River Valley was in a setting of bushland on the river. There were some nice walking tracks among the eucalyptus trees, where we could really feel part of nature. A positive sign of the regeneration of nature were the sprouting trees that showed obvious signs of fire. Some had completely burned out inside, but were green with fresh branches at the outer side of the trunk. There were even some plants,

like the grass tree called "black boy" that can only bloom after a bushfire, others have seeds that only pop open with the help of fire. In fact, the Rangers of modern times had to learn from the Aboriginal people, who knew this long ago.

As the weather spoiled us, we jumped in the pool very often and as X-Mas was approaching, the forecasted crowd suddenly rushed in and therefore now also the shop, sauna and spa were operating. On Christmas day, we were invited by the club members to a communal lunch under the shady trees. We and also the other tourists, which came from America, run into a bit of a cultural misunderstanding there. As we were told to bring our own plates, we thought we contribute with two loafs of freshly baked bread, which we did in the morning, believing everyone else would also bring some food to share. But there we were, with our empty plates, soon realizing, it was meant like "bring your own and eat your own". Never mind, we started to distribute our bread anyway, it would have been far too much for us and then we took some cheese out of our fridge to fill our empty plates... On the other end of the table, we saw the Americans feasting on 30 satay-sticks, accompanied only by a slice of bread.

On this place, we didn't see too much wildlife, except from many colourful birds. But there were the Royal Australian Mossies. They were not big in numbers, but in size! Often when we sent one to heaven, (our?) blood was splashing in drops all around, that huge they had been.

## Naturist-Club Helios

After two weeks at River Valley, we changed to **Helios**, a big member-owned naturist club near Melbourne. Equipped with a map and description, received by e-mail after phoning them, we tried to find it. However, it wasn't that easy. We passed the gate three times and still were not sure, whether this was the right address. There was no Helios sign at all, instead: a chain with no less than six padlocks and signs reading "wildlife and water conservation", names of security guards and gas providers. But behind it, was indeed that Helios, and nothing else. Despite that grim first impression, the club and its people were really nice. Here we had reserved a cabin for two weeks.



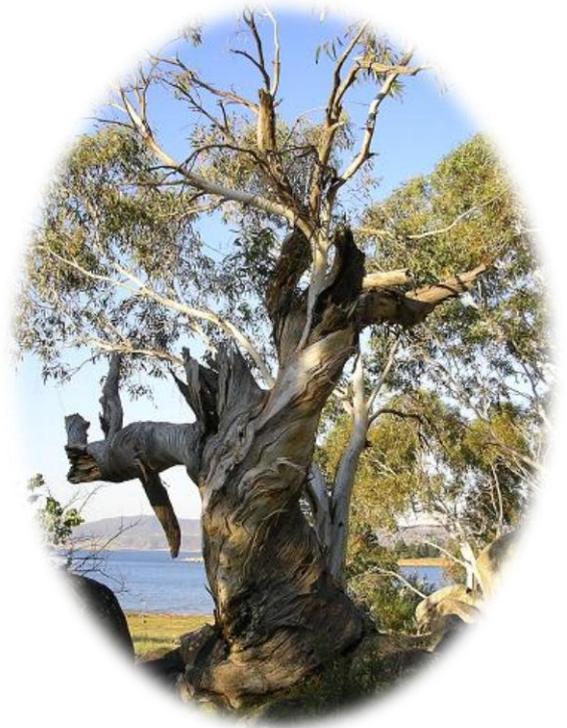
As we were the first foreign visitors they had in 17 years, the club took this as a reason to go ahead with the long planned improvements and so the cabin had hastily been refurbished prior to our arrival. German immigrants have founded Helios more than 40 years ago; some of them had even pre-arranged their membership from home, before sailing out to a hopeful future in Australia. About half of the people owned a caravan and the other had built cabins. Considering that there had been a devastating bush-fire 18 years ago, it was unbelievably green and had lots of tall trees and ferns. It was set in a valley with a little river flowing through. As some parts were swampy, they had built a nice boardwalk in the forest, which was used as a fund-raising project at the same time. One member had donated all the wood and the idea was that whoever wanted, could pay \$ 20 for a single plank, which then was engraved with the name of the donor. Many did so and the result is a very pretty boardwalk with names written on every second piece of wood.



For New Year's Eve, three big roasts were put on a spit, distributing an irresistibly nice smell all afternoon. For \$10 a head, we had a very delicious meal with 90 other people, celebrating the start of 2005. After the weather had been very warm for the last few weeks, we suddenly needed umbrellas and heater. Because of Helios' location in the Dandenong Range, temperatures are always colder than in Melbourne, which doesn't have a reputation for stable weather anyway. On our last night, ten days later, Jana and Klaus, the couple who had checked us in, invited us.

## Crossing the mountains to the modern capital Canberra

Upon leaving Helios, we drove north-east towards the mountains. We stayed two nights in **Bright**, which attracts many skiers during the winter months of June - September. From there, we explored **Mount Buffalo**, which had many nice lookouts and natural wonders like balancing rocks. Along the alpine way, we passed various artificial lakes, slowly moving up to the highest area of the fifth continent. Leaving Victoria, we came into New South Wales Territory on a road that requires snow-chains during winter, as it passes very near Australia's highest peak, Mount Kosciuszko with an altitude of 2'228 m. Overnight, we stayed at Jindabyne, an purposely built ski resort town on an artificial lake. By chance, we found this Thai restaurant that only just opened that very day. Although it didn't look too inviting, we gave it a try, as all the other affordable restaurants we found, served only "fast-food". Surprise, surprise: we were served by far the best Thai food since we left Thailand.



We continued our trip, visiting **Canberra** in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). As the two biggest cities Melbourne and Sydney had not been able to agree which one should become the capital, the federal government had decided in 1908 to create Canberra as a solution. Today's modern Parliament building was opened in 1988 and it's an architectural masterpiece. It is set in line with the old parliament house and an ANZAC war-memorial three kilometres across the river, which had been converted into a lake for the project. Two bridges cross that water and are also integrated in that perfect geometrical layout. As it was a sizzling 40° degree hot, it wasn't a pleasure to wander those huge parklands for long.

As it seemed that all the youth hostels were booked out, we got a room at the Hotel "Formule 1", which was introduced on this continent recently by the French Accor Hotel chain. It really looked alike its counterparts in Europe but for one thing we noticed, they had to adjust to the local habits: Instead of offering a discounted yummy set-meal at a nearby restaurant, here they had installed a machine which dispensed yucky factory processed food packets that only needed to be heated up in the microwave that stood next to it.

## Sydney and the surrounding country

On a highway, we whistled ourselves to **Sydney**, which took us less than three hours. We stayed at one of the many Backpacker's places in the red light district of Kings Cross and we even managed to find free parking in the city center. Internet access was dirt-cheap; some cyber-café's asked for no more than \$ 2 (€ 1.20) flat rate for unlimited access. That meant, the budget conscious traveller could use the computer until he fell off the chair - many places remained open 24 hours.



We loved the stroll around the Opera-House, the port area, the harbour bridge and touristy Darling-harbour and China Town no less than when we saw it for the first time. The atmosphere was just magic by day and night. This is what all tourists like, but the real city center was too hectic, we felt and very business oriented. It didn't become as cosmopolitan and charming as Melbourne did.

From Sydney, we moved up to **Katoomba** in the **Blue Mountains**. Although it was 100 km away from the big city, it felt as if we were just out of the suburbs and the attractions clearly catered for the city folks and their chicks. The natural attraction were three rock-outcrops called "the 3 sisters" but the artificial ones were things like the cable cars that no hiker can every use, as the gondola only moved out half way, then stopped until everyone had taken a picture of the little waterfall and then went back the same way.

Not far from there, we visited a second family we knew from our last trip. Louise and Rob and their children that now are no children anymore. We had visited them in Darwin 12 years ago, but in the meantime they moved back to their house near Sydney. It was interesting to see them again and we spent a nice afternoon together.



Continuing our way, we followed a pretty river, which we crossed at Wieseman Ferry point. As this winding route took much longer than the Lady at the tourist office had predicted, we stopped at nightfall in the country town of **Wyong**. There was nowhere else to stay than at the local pub and so we witnessed one of the bad habits of some Australians. Getting drunk and noisy, the people got out of control already at 11 pm. Smashing windows and "dirtying" the streets, we were surprised that nobody seemed willing to interfere with them, trying to stop such behaviours. Of course, for those who get involved with illegal drugs, no tolerance applied, but what's the difference?

## We continue northwards

We drove along the coastal road up to **Newcastle** and later via the beach resorts of Forster to **Port-Macquarie**. Here we visited the patients at the Koala Hospital, one of the rare occasions to see those marsupials up close. Normally they spend their time pretty high up the trees, feeding on Eucalypt leaves. They only find 36 species of gum trees delicious, out of an incredible 600 that exist.

## Naturist ground Twin Falls

Although the weather forecast predicted some more rain, as we had had during the last week, we decided to go to **Twin Falls Nature Retreat** a Naturist resort not far inland. A couple in our age runs it very personally: Chinese born Yü Jng, alias Yolanda and her Australian husband Ian. They offer B&B, Homestay accommodation, plus for those who want to be closer to nature: camping or a big cabin that formerly was a shed. It was situated near the swimming pool and the covered BBQ. We took that cabin to have a bit of bush adventure, but we did not imagine how much we would be in it! To watch the abundant wildlife wasn't only possible around that hut but also inside. As we were the only guests, we thought we would have a relaxing time, but every few hours we were busy running after a new kind of animal, either to watch and picture it, or to chase it out of our cottage, which still had many possibilities for them to sneak in, as renovation wasn't fully completed then. Daily, we came across some new species, but the most numerous were the Wallabies, which actually look like little Kangaroos. Dozens of them were grazing around the cabin every morning and evening. When we went for a stroll in the forest, we quickly learned, that we should at least wear some hiking boots, as we were greeted enthusiastically by dozens of leeches that preyed on our blood, now so shortly after the rain. Another day, a small snake was on the pursuit of a mouse, just outside our door - after we showed a picture of our visitor to Ian, we learned that it was a young venomous snake that could grow up to two meters - at least it had remained outside. A Possum, a mouse and a rat came regularly to check whether they could find our food and some big spiders called this cabin their home before we moved in. Not so a 40 cm long Lizard that crossed the cabin as a morning exercise. Some even bigger and fatter Lizards and a 2½ m long Goanna could be seen just around the lawn. Another morning, we found two Goannas fighting hard for the good bits of a dead wallaby. The whole cycle of catch and prey could be seen at this true nature and naturist retreat.



Although Twinn Falls was only 5 km away from the next hamlet, it was not connected to the electricity wiring network. So, Ian had installed a fuel generator-supported solar system, which delivered 220V. As almost everywhere out of the villages, water was collected from a private well or from a river, as townwater supply was not provided. Connected or not, rainwater was being collected from the roof of almost every house, as it was considered to taste better by anyone, as this was chlorine free. Often only the toilet was going into a sewage system or tank, but outside urbanized areas, shower and kitchen drains were mostly released straight out into nature.

As our kitchen was outside under the roof, we stored some food in our car. So, one morning, when opening the trunk, a little frog was jumping in out of nowhere, probably to inspect it.

Our hosts Yolanda and Ian invited us regularly to socialise on their veranda. In Australia this is called "happy hour", which here means: "bring your own drink". Here in their house, they had also the rooms of their B&B/homestead plus a spa.

Those who didn't want to cook by themselves could also order "nude breakfast, lunch or dinner" from the menu. Dinner was always served on the family table and Yolanda's original Chinese cooking was just superb, it was really worthwhile to invest in a freshly cooked banquet-dinner. No wonder that some guests return just for a "nude dinner"! Unfortunately, as we had to eat the food we had brought in from the supermarket 40 km away, we could profit only once, from what was probably the world's only nude Chinese Restaurant. We truly enjoyed our stay at Twin Falls and had some really interesting discussions with Yolanda & Ian who shared quite a bit of their time with us, bringing us closer to Chinese and Australian way of living and habits. Like when we learned that it is common to praise a good child with the words "*you clever little Vegemite*"...

(\*to us Vegemite is equally horrible to Marmite, but Aussies claim it's much better - religiously).

Ian tries to compile a complete listing of all Australian naturist retreats and clubs, which would be pretty helpful for the many overseas visitors. At present, the INF guide lists 30 clubs and resorts, and the ANF (Australian Naturist Federation)-leaflet and Website counts 48, but in fact the real number is probably closer to 80 as on every place we have been, we found out about some more. Most seem to be naturally situated in year-round warm Queensland, where new ones open up and close down almost on a monthly interval.

## Youth-hostel wit naturist trips

Continuing our way, we did an inland loop through the Great Dividing Ranges, stopping at the charming town of Armidale that had a surprising number of beautiful old fashioned houses. Overnight, we stayed at the [YHA](#) associated **Backpackers Hostel in Bellingen**. The young enthusiastic owners created a laid back atmosphere and offered a variety of unusual tours like canoeing at night to spot wildlife or a trip to a nude-beach. The owner is a devoted photographer and he has been surprisingly successful finding volunteers among the backpackers who didn't mind to pose in the buff and have their picture displayed on the hostels big "nude walls" even though for most of them it was probably the first time they had been to a nude beach. In February 2005 there were more than 850 people from 60 countries that had been brave enough to model, 25% of whom came from the UK and many from continental Europe, but countries like Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Surinam and Chile were also represented.

As this tour to the nude beach was held on Tuesday, we couldn't contribute, as we arrived on a Wednesday. All of the pictures were done in a very artistic way and all would qualify as front cover for the Australian Naturist Magazine (TAN). As that magazine is being sold on newsstands, nipples and genitals are banned to show on the front cover. And so are those pictures in the youth hostel - but certainly more artistic - we found. They would qualify for a nude art exhibition. Unbelievable as it is, this backpacker's accommodation was certainly more successful in leading people to discover nudism than most of the Australian naturist resorts and clubs, which were normally quite lonely.

Leaving Bellingen, we noticed many tropical trees with big flowers and those flies that had annoyed us all the time before were not around here anymore. Up here, good summer weather was stable again with temperatures around 30 degrees but traffic info radio announced that the roads in the snowy mountains 1'000

km south had to be closed due to heavy snowfall in the midst of summer (on 2.2.05) and barely two weeks after we had been there - staying in an air conditioned room, as it was quite hot then. Coming back to the coast around Coffs Harbor; we passed all those artificial tourist attractions as the "big banana", "big pineapple", "big crab" and so on - big crap! Often when we stopped in some little country villages, we found a constant smell of beer and oil from deep-fryers hanging in the air and even if the whole village was 'closed', at least a drive-through bottle shop remained open.

## Byron-Bay

Our next stop was at surprisingly bustling touristy **Byron-Bay**. This village makes a fortune because of its long sandy beach, the surf and its reputation of being alternative. It isn't a place where hippies grow their own vegetable and smoke a joint as we heard is common in neighbouring Nimbin and Lismore. By the way: several operators offer tours just to see the "Weirdo's" in Nimbin.

Byron is rather the place where uncountable little businesses try to make money out of alternative lifestyles. Probably over 100 practitioners offered courses and healing sessions like Reiki, Yoga, Tarot and Tantra. Spiritual healing-sittings were available in such a variety and density, that it looked to us, as if according to their advertisements they expected everybody to have some problem to solve, but probably the few ones who really needed help were left out, because they might not have been able to afford these rather expensive healing sessions.

Byron was also the place to be for the young party-folks and therefore, accommodation was plentiful but scarce when we were there. We phoned 15 places and still had to change hostels three times, as we liked to stay for a week. Finally we managed to stay right behind Belongil Beach and everything seemed perfect until we discovered that some bedbugs shared the room with us! Our legs were full of these horribly itchy bites in a line, that are typical for that kind of pest. Upon informing reception, we were immediately upgraded to a luxury room and granted one night for free. Subject to pest-treatment, each and every piece of our clothing had been washed by the hostel (how nice) and all non-washable items like backpacks got a special heat-treatment to make sure we don't distribute these nasty animals all over the continent.

For a whole week we enjoyed carefree beach life on Belongil, a legal nude beach, situated just in front of some housing developments which probably helped to keep gawks away. As we were shortly before the Queensland border, we wanted to take advantage of the clear warm water still, as the self proclaimed sunshine state is Australia's only state that does not allow legal nude beaches. In the rest of the country you never had to go far to find one. A second reason was the fact that further north various small jellyfish pose a deadly danger to bathers along the shore from November till April. Some are only as big as a thimble but have tentacles as long as 7 meters, which they can roll out of their body. If they sting you, you'll die quicker than you can write your last will! We took the hurdle and left the area of the "Mexicans" as the Queenslanders call the people south of their borders. In return, Queenslanders are known as "banana benders"...



## Naturist ground Elephant Rock

Our trip continued to **Elephant Rock**, a naturist camp run by Sue and her Estonian born husband Jaak. This place had 6 moderately priced rooms (\$ 65) all with en suite facilities plus about a dozen campsites. There was a big communal area with lounge, kitchen and internet, where everybody gathered to cook and eat or enjoy the percolated coffee which was being provided. Here, they also served the meals for those who preferred that Sue did the cooking for them. As the pool and spa were situated on a slope, a big wooden veranda was surrounding it, making plenty of space for deckchairs, other garden furniture and space to linger around and mingle with other guests. As they fed the wild parrots there, we got a chance to see and picture the very colourful King Parrot and Rainbow Lorikeet. During the day, some Goannas and in the evening some frogs and toads came visiting.

Elephant Rock was set in the bush on the foot of an elephant shaped hill and there were some nature walks around the property.

As we meanwhile had gotten used to how lonely Australian naturist sites often are, it was a surprise to us that during the one week we stayed, we had the place only for two days all to ourselves. On the weekend, there were even 10 other guests, enough to have a boule competition.

Also here, we had some very nice talks to the owners, and they were so kind to let us use their private computer and oven so we could bake some bread.

## Brisbane

From there, we headed to **Brisbane** diving for 4 days into city life. This fast growing state capital was situated along a riverbend. It wasn't particularly special, neither good nor bad - just another b.f. city, as the Australians would say, in which most streets were named after some English Royals.



The Australian continent is very big, in fact much bigger than Europe but inhabited by only 20 Mio people and 106 Mio sheep plus of course an uncountable number of roos and other wild animals. Economically, it is a strong country in good shape. Australians are usually well travelled and therefore it's no surprise that some of the big successful travel businesses originated here, as for example Flight Centre or Lonely Planet Guidebooks.

Most Aussies love the beach, the sun and the outdoors, however they are not particularly active and many are couch potatoes resulting in 60% of the population obese or overweight. They love "barbies", (BBQ), with lots of meat but despite the fact that most of the cities are dotted along Australia's 36'735 km of coastline, they rarely eat fish, except if it's concealed as "Fish & Chips". Fresh fish was hard to find and it usually had been frozen fillets, when sold in the supermarket.

As a multicultural society, the Aussies are also very tolerant and very easy going. Everybody likes to party but in order to get pissed (drunk), the bars and clubs often imposed strict dress codes, as no singlets and no thongs. Even in the towns, people could often be seen walking in thongs or barefoot. Do you like a sample how the Aussies use their slang? *"When OZ Sheilas and Blokes have washed their ratshit (lousy) tucker (food) down with too much piss (beer), they fear the booze bus (alcohol breath testing unit) but still greet the cop with a grin "G'day mate"*. Australians also like to surf and the beginners are called "shark biscuits" and "no humbugging" signs mean no begging for food and drink allowed. Aussies also like to brag with superlatives. In Brisbane we stayed once more in "Australia's best Backpacker's Resort, passed the chain store who advertised it's "rat coffins" (beef pies) as 'the best pies in the world', a secondhand dealer tried to sell his 'moving shit' (Holden) cars as 'the best cars on the planet' and a bakery chain sold it's crap as the 'best bread in the world'. Just bad luck for them that there was often a Vietnamese bakery just around the corner that sold much cheaper and for our taste also much better crusty French-type breads, croissants and pastries!

## North of Brisbane

Leaving Brisbane, we drove past the Glasshouse Mountains, 6 pretty cone shaped volcanic crags, before visiting our German friend Silke in Caloundra. Heinz knew her from his first trip to Australia and six years ago she came back and immigrated here. Thanks to the fact that she moved away from the big city, she was able to buy a very nice house with big gardens, even with only a part time job, because she is studying to get a bachelor's degree. In comparison to real estate prices in Germany or Switzerland, houses are still relatively cheap here. However, we noticed that prices skyrocketed in the last 12 years. Silke took us to the pretty Mapleton Falls Nations Park and Kondalilla that



both offered very scenic walks in cool rainforest, which was very welcome in this heat. Some (other) brave people even jumped into the cool pool that had formed on the bottom of the waterfall. Two times, we went for a walk on the beach. The one time when Silke took her two dogs along, we were quite amazed how excited these animals could get. Even though we knew by now, that these two never seemed to run out of energy and asked for Silke's attention almost round the clock.

On sentimental reasons, Brigitte wished to go back to **Hervey Bay** to which she was reminded of a real good time in 1988, when she first knew Gusti, our good friend from Austria. So we went to stay at that Backpackers place once more. It had grown and been modernized a bit in the meantime. Also here we went for a wonderful beach walk before sunset, reminding ourselves how cold it must be now in Switzerland end of February.

## Savannah Park Nudist Resort

Our next stay was 5 days at **Savannah Park Nudist Resort**, near Yeppon. It had only been built five years ago by Heather and Trevor, a couple from New Zealand. When they started to build this place out of the bush they had yet to clear, they were already 67 and 68. We were quite impressed by the high standard they have achieved within only six months of construction time but now we hope they might soon get a helping hand. They offer camping and six on-site caravans for rent, all of which have proper double beds. A big kitchen, lounge and billiard table is in a separate building. There is a small 7 hole golf course for amateurs who want to have fun and a small pool to cool off after activity.

There were also 3 km of bushwalks during which we noticed termites that built their giant housing units in the trees, bringing all the mud up and glue it to some branches. Then, there was a type of green ants that plied and glued leaves together on the branch and built their nest about the size of a grapefruit.

On our way north, we passed by some very large sugar cane fields again. This is another plant that takes advantage of northern Australia's tropical climate. We had seen already some Banana, Pineapple, Avocado and Mango fields, but also oranges, rice and coffee are grown here. As the southern half has a more moderate climate, also apples, pears, grapes and strawberries or cherries grow here. What a lucky country, including milk and honey, they have it all! The Aussies have also many juice bars which offer freshly squeezed fruit juices and smoothies or shakes: a blend of fresh fruit, ice and ice cream.

## Goodys; where naturism is accepted and popular among neighbours

Our next home away from home was at **Goodys**, another small naturist retreat in Sarina about 30 km south of Mackay. The owners Sandra a Pom (English) and Allan, a Kiwi (New Zealander) made us very welcome. They had a very nice swimming pool which superbly overlooks the surrounding hills. The clubhouse next to it had a lounge, pool table, a communal kitchen and BBQ area.

As accommodation options, they offered camping and on site caravans all with nice covered verandas with concrete floors and garden furniture. We opted to pay \$ 10 more and rented the 'deluxe caravan' and this was really a worthwhile decision. Apart from a bigger bed and AC, this van had something which is very important to us and we hadn't seen in any naturist accommodation we stayed at Down Under: proper cooking facilities. Next to the microwave which is standard equipment, there was really a full gas stove with 4 hot plates and an oven. We just loved it! Less luxury but very unique was the sanitary block; an experience not to be missed. It used to be a "pig pen", which was renovated and converted in a way that you could still see the pigs compartments that today contain toilets, showers and handbassins. All was clean but sometimes the loo's were occupied by frogs, as seen elsewhere in Australia too.



Goody's was not as isolated as most others - it was situated in the midst of a small hamlet and therefore especially the area where they kept their four cows and where they had their little fruit orchard plus a pond with some ducks, was within sight of some neighbours houses. We were really impressed about the openness of Sandra & Allan, who are new to this hamlet and how they managed to share their philosophy of life and nude style of living with these neighbours. Instead of fencing their property off (difficult on a hillside) they invited the people of the 40 closest houses to a BBQ, which was to become "cloths optional" after 4 pm. Eight families turned up and nobody left after the meal. Exactly at 4 o'clock the first neighbour stripped off and headed for the pool. All others followed so quickly, Sandra and Allan were apparently so baffled; they said they were the last ones to take their cloths off. Since then, more and more neighbours joined in, adults and children, bringing their friends along regularly for a few hours of leisure time.

Allan works as a school bus driver and Sandra at the local doctors, and everybody knows they are "nudies" and nobody seems to have a problem with this. So we were joking, they could soon put up a sign "nude community" at the entrance of the village.

We stayed for a week and were the only overnight guests, but especially on Sat./Sun. it got quite busy, mainly by these newly converted people from the neighbourhood. Nudity became that normal to them, that when we asked Sandra & Allan to be in a picture with us, all the others spontaneously volunteered to join in as well. Another pleasant experience we had thanks to Marcus, one of the neighbours who showed us his adjoining property, a big piece of meadows and rainforest. He and his partner Janine, had bought it spontaneously after their first visit to Goody's. First, he drove us up in a 4WD through 2½meter high grassland to a viewpoint and later we were guided to the rainforest, making our way up a dry riverbed to see some waterholes and impressive strangler fig trees. Of course, as a real Aussie, he purposely tried to find all these scary animals, the fearful tourist tries to avoid. And he succeeded: he showed us big spiders and a scorpion that had been hiding under a stone.

When we left Goody's, we got some star fruits and grapefruit to take along as a last sweat memory.



## Taylorwood; naturists as WWOOF-ers

Only 200 km north, we reached **Taylorwood**, which was easy to find, since they posted huge signs on the road leading into Airlie Beach. It didn't mention "naturist site", but everybody who knows it, will find it without any problem. The campsites were dotted around the forest with the majority carved like terraces into the hillside and some more along the flat meadow along a creek by the road. There were many neat stairs going up to the pool area, through beautiful forest of old blackboys, grasstree that grew quite tall here and thus were very old. Under an open roof was a big communal area, but the kitchen equipment was definitely only catering for those who either barbecue or microwave their food, but not for those that like to do some sophisticated cooking. Luckily, we met that elderly French couple that was also staying there and they recommended a superb French restaurant, which we visited together. Taylorwood was working to replace their old on-site caravans with nice en-suite cabins and we stayed in the first one that had been finished. As they offered the cheapest powered sites on a "long term rate", it apparently is very popular during the winter dry months of April - October, when 60 - 70 people are staying, some for two to six months we heard. By then, the weather will still be quite warm here, while it is going to be cold in the southern states of the country.

Uns ist auch aufgefallen, wie die Leute hier oft über ihre "winterfesten Feriengäste" aus australiens südlichen Staaten, Neuseeland, Europa oder Nordamerika lächeln. Für die Queensländer, ist es einfach unvorstellbar, mitten im Winter in ein ungeheiztes Schwimmbecken zu springen. Für die Gäste aus den weniger sommerverwöhnten Regionen der Welt, ist auch im australischen Winter ein Bad im erfrischenden Nass eine willkommene Abkühlung; wie kalt "eiskalt" ist, ist eben relativ.

We were a bit puzzled when we heard some shooting at night and the next morning we learned that the owner was after some goannas or snakes in order to protect their and their guests pet-birds. The owners who have previously lived in South Africa and Canada were often having some young people helping them as "WWOOF-ers". That's often backpackers that join the program "Willing Workers on Organic Farms" (or something else alternative), which means that they get free food and accommodation in return for four hours work each day.

One afternoon, we visited Airlie Beach which has become quite a bustling tourist village, since all the sailing trips to the Whitsunday Islands leave from there.



## Murrigal Nature Retreat

After passing again endless sugar plantations, we stopped right on Bruce Highway, at **Murrigal Nature Retreat** ([murrigal@bigpond.com](mailto:murrigal@bigpond.com)), 17 km south of Tully. Jenny and Archie run this place very personal and very enthusiastically. For a long time, this was the first nudist place run by true Aussie born Mates! From almost all the others, at least one partner of the owners' couple was overseas born. Funnily, especially here on the East Coast, half of the guests are overseas tourists, and from the Australian guests, again half were born overseas. Most came from one of the enlarged EU-Member countries, predominantly from the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and from the eastern parts of the former iron curtain. In addition, Asians from all over their continent, immigrants and tourists alike, enjoyed the freedom of being nude Down Under. We definitely got the impression, that naturism in Australia is predominantly a "business" run by Expat's to serve other Expat's and Tourists (just as good bakeries and restaurants).

Oh no, it is not really a business! In Australia nobody can make a living from a nudist resort. If the owners weren't pensioners, at least one of the partners still had another job. For most owners it was their philosophy of life, which they were willing to share with likeminded people, rather than a way of making money. Especially along Queensland's coastal areas, there were many small camping's that catered for max 30 - 40 guests. They were all packed full for 2-3 weekends a year, including New Year and otherwise, depending on the season; they had normally nil to 4 guests, exceptionwise maybe 10.



There were plenty of new little resorts opening up all the time, and often those who were not designed to make any money survived, but many others were up for sale or just disappeared after one or two years, as the owners get too old or realise that more money goes out than in and so they feel it's just not worth the effort. We feel also, that naturism Down Under is pretty accepted, but not popular at all! Australians seem to prefer to go to nude beaches only, which are abundant all around urbanized areas, except in conservative Queensland, as we have mentioned before.

On the other hand, contrary to Europe, where nudist sites are big business: it is very nice how personal they all are here and how well we always got to know the owners. In Europe, most of the time nobody even knows who the owners are and we can only think of 3 small camping's in France, where we got to know the people quite well: Lissart, Chaudeau and Eglantiere.

But let's go back to Murrigal: Here both partners work full time and five years ago, when they decided to use the 4 acres of garden around their family home as a nudist camping, they added a big swimming pool, five on-site caravans and a cabin. Further, they built a big covered communal area, where they now also barbecue or cook on the wood fired stove every night for themselves and their children, of which they had 5. Jenny and Archie tried hard to attract also people who had not yet been naturists, so they advertised in the local paper, the tourist office and in a backpacker's magazine.

Jenny and Archie were real Aussie Characters. When we first phoned, every question we've asked was answered by "we will look after you Mate". Now we experienced how much they looked after us; we were spoilt in every respect! Jenny baked lovely scones in the wood-stove oven, tea and coffee was not only provided, it

was even prepared. More often than not, Archie also washed our dirty dishes - but we can't promise he will do it for everyone in the future!

As we were now in Australia's tropic region, we were affected by the wet season that can flood roads for days. There was also a fair share of mosquitoes around, but Archie always told us to "sit down and relax", got up from his chair and placed mosquito-coils all around us. He constantly offered some of his home brewed beer and it took him three days to believe that we don't drink beer at all. We appreciated that they purposely kept the place TV-free, as this gave us the opportunity to have undisturbed conversations. As Archie works in one of these big sugar mills, we could ask about the processing of the canes. After June, there would even be tours and Archie sometimes takes some guests along in the big sugar trains as he drives a locomotive during harvesting. They normally move 220 sugarcane-carriages of four meters length. The mill, where he works, owns 11 locomotives and 300 km of rail track across the fields and all over Queensland, there must be ten thousands. After the juice is crushed out of the cane, it is boiled to become molasses that later evaporates to crystal sugar.

Although Murrigal was situated between the road and the railway line, we didn't have a problem with noise, since up here there was not much traffic up there. The prices for their on-site vans were all very low and at the moment they were building some more cabins. We were now not surprised anymore, that the carpenter that helped constructing, regularly drove the 40 meters to the house by car. In Australia, no distance seems too short to drive by car, even if it meant to make a big detour and spend more time - people just didn't seem to think of ever walking!

## Mission Beach

On a dry and partly sunny day, we had a wonderful outing to **Mission Beach**. We went for a walk to the Licuala forest to see these beautiful fan palms with their round leaves, the size of an umbrella. The 15 meters high palm trees are unique to this area and can stand swampy soils. After taking many pictures, we were even more excited after seeing a Cassowary. A wingless bird the size of an emu, with a red and blue neck and a helmet. They are an endangered species and there are only about 40 of them left in this area - so we were really lucky buggars! A present for Brigitte's 43rd birthday.



## Cairns

After whistling ourselves 160 km up along dry roads, which had floodwater standing on both sides, we reached [Cairns](#). This town is a pretty touristy place which many people use as a base for trips out to the **Great Barrier Reef**, where they go snorkeling or scuba diving. Apart from many places that sold tourist kitsch, there were also many luxury boutiques and gem stores that often aimed at rich Asian tourists. Not all the personnel spoke English as Japanese and Chinese were on higher demand. They were responding to the advertising that was heavily pushed by the Australian Tourist Authority, which realised the big potential these markets bare. They were aiming mainly at the densely populated countries, as China and India, but also at Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore - the Japanese were already good customers for a long time.

**Cairns** is touristy, but the city has a charming feel. Cairns has a real centre with big pedestrian's areas between the many restaurants and shops. Among the people strolling around the streets, were also many locals, so it does not have a "tourist-ghetto only" feel, although, like in the big French naturist centres, some staff of the tourist information are Dutch immigrants, so they can serve the many European tourists in all their native languages!

Also we could take advantage of the exaggerated tourist-industry. So, we dined in Restaurants from all over the world and got some crusty and dense bread or pastry from the Swiss and Austrian bakeries.

We were still very lucky with the weather, a cyclone warning had passed 1 week ago and there was over 700 mm of rain coming down just before we arrived. In good weather we strolled along the newly built boardwalk

above the swampy beach in front of Cairns downtown. To make it possible to swim, the town built a huge swimming lagoon that can be used for free and even had lifeguards on duty. This was particularly appreciated as there was no safe place to swim all along north Queensland's coastal areas. Apart from the dangerous jellyfish, saltwater-crocodiles frequent all rivers, lakes and ponds and now more often also beaches. There were crocodile warning-signs all along Cairns Esplanade. At least they were only dangerous in the water.



Skin cancer was also a big problem here. It was hard to find a sun blocker with a factor less than 30. Although many Aussies had a little suntan, not like 12 years ago, when all tourists were tanned and all the locals were white as snow, giving them no protection and if they were occasionally kissed by a sunray, they turned red immediately. In Tasmania, the

government even passed a new law that school children have to walk in the sun for 20 minutes each day (if it shines at all) as their over-protection from the sun resulted in a proven lack of vitamin D. As some movement is also pretty healthy, the government killed two birds with one stone.

## White Cockatoo

During our travels up the east-coast, we mentioned on various nudist places, that we had booked at the "White Cockatoo" in Mossman, which is run as a nudist resort between October and May, but is a textile place during the other half of the year. Whenever we said that we were going there, we always got a meaningful smile and the comment "wondering what you will think about that place"...

On March 20, 2005 we arrived at the "[White Cockatoo](#)" that is run by Lenore and Tony Fox. It was by far the most expensive resort we have stayed at, but we paid for a week getting the rate down from 89 to 75 Dollars. Our first impression was very good, as they had nice bungalows and a beautiful garden and pool, and all within walking distance of Mossman with Woolworth, Bakery, Banks, Restaurants and more.

After reading on their information-leaflet: "please join us for Happy Hour drinks by the pool or in the bar 5-6 pm daily, where you can enjoy discounted beer, wine and spirits...± we asked Lenore whether soft drinks were also discounted. She answered No, as she thinks soft drinks that sell for \$ 2.50 (What we paid in most places in Australia) are already cheap enough. So, we replied that this was no problem for us, but as we don't drink alcohol at all, we will not order any drinks from the bar, as we think, they should be equally discounted.

However, at 5:30 pm we joined the table where also the other guests gathered for the "happy hour", sat and talked, but didn't drink. As one guest played the guitar, it was quite a nice atmosphere.

After about one hour, Tony the owner, took Heinz aside and said that to him, it was provocative, that we didn't order anything to drink. He repeated what his wife had said and got quite angry after Heinz said, he felt it was not fair to only discount alcoholic drinks but not soft drinks. The quarrel went on and Tony said that if we were not supporting his business and behave according to his rules, he can no longer give us internet access, bicycle use and other services like airport transfer etc. All these were freebies advertised on their website. Getting even louder, he said something like "you can put on the internet that I am an asshole, but anyway, I don't like guests like you at all!".

Under these circumstances, we decided to leave the next morning but Lenore refused to refund all the prepaid nights, declaring that if it was OUR decision to leave early, she would generously charge us only one night's cancellation fee instead of two, which was 89 Dollars, the same price she now charged for the two nights we had stayed. No way, she would discuss the matter and after she had asked us four times, whether we would "accept her offer", we felt pressured to do so, as we were afraid, she wouldn't refund anything at all otherwise.

A few weeks later, we joined a function with some other naturists, during which we came to talk of the "WC" again. There were many stories about that place going around about an unaccountable number of reasons, why an arrogant Tony Fox got out of control and insulted his guests. We even heard about some cases, where he threw them out not verbally only.

After we wrote about our only bad naturist experience we ever had to a local naturist magazine, we got the following reply: "Unfortunately, your story is not unique. I have had dozens and dozens of similar complaints about White Cockatoo over the past 12 months. I will have to check the legality of publishing your letter, but it does seem like a necessary story to tell to warn others".

Apparently, some nudist places around Cairns were considering sending Tony&Lenore Fox a bunch of flowers, to thank them for all the many guests they received, after one or two nights at the "White Cockatoo", escaping with yet another story why they didn't stay.

After escaping from the W.C. (White Cockatoo), the only bad naturist experience we ever had, we found shelter at Muzlil in Cairns. Sandra and Allan from Goodys had recommended us this place and now we were very happy, we had their number.

## Lillian und Murray's backyard naturist cottage

Muzlil is **Lillian & Murray's** place, they have a nice house in a quiet residential area and they rent out their new "granny flat" in their back yard. After our phonecall, they hastily finished the tiling of the big patio, so they could accommodate us. As common for most new housing areas in Australia, their property is fenced off by two meter high walls and therefore their garden and pool area were perfectly suitable for naturists. Especially up here in the tropical north, many people own a pool and we heard that it is not uncommon that people take their gear off in the privacy of their garden. When Lillian and Murray travel, they enjoy to stay at naturist-places and in return open their own doors to travelling fellow naturists visiting Cairns. Apart from the almost daily "happy hours" (here we were allowed to bring our own drinks again), where they always offered some delicious snacks, they invited us for a superb seafood-dinner on Good Friday.

Murray didn't really need to tell us, that he is a builder. Just by looking around, it became obvious that everything around the house was done with devotion. Their pool was superbly landscaped and equipped with a waterfall. The studio-flat where we stayed, was by far the nicest we had rented down-under. Apart from a good modern kitchen, there was a washing machine and outside we had 40 m<sup>2</sup> of covered patio, where we took the chance to get a haircut in the buff, by their daughter-in-law. Thanks to their offering to look after our car during the month we went to Micronesia ([chapter 10 B](#)), we could relax and enjoy the last 5 days before our departure on March 28, 2005.



So, on April 28, 05, we were back in **Australia** and got another 6 months entry permit stamped in our passports. When fetching our luggage, sniffer-dogs were checking whether we were bringing fruit or vegetable into the country and later on, a customs-clerk gave us a content smile, when he was checking whether there was dirt on our hiking boots. He didn't get us with that! We knew how strict Australia tries to keep disease out and we had, previously, seen people cleaning dirt off their camping gear on the airport, so we had smartly washed our hiking boots beforehand.

Restrictions of bringing fruit, vegetable and dirty gear apply even between some Australian states.

From the airport, we took a taxi to Lillian & Murray's place, where we arrived at midnight. We found a lovely note on the table saying, "welcome home" and a fridge full with breakfast items. How nice of them. The next morning, they "delivered" our car that had been stored at their son's place.

As it had rained a lot during the time we were away (see?), our car looked as washed, but soon we discovered, storing a car in tropical climate can be a tricky matter. When we opened the doors, there were several little frogs and gecko's hiding in the gap's and they immediately took the chance to jump not out, but in, giving us some exercise chasing them. Opening the trunk, we found quite a few of our stored belongings covered in grey fungus. So we had something to do now.

## Emu Creek Holiday Station: naturist outing to a giant farm

Whenever there is a naturist event taking place in the surrounding, Lillian and Murray try to give their guests the possibility to join in. So they had organized already 5 weeks ago that we could go along to a function with the **Barrier Reef Sun Club**, of which they are members. They have some event about every two weeks on their club-ground near Kuranda, where they have some rental caravans for those who want to visit on the week-end. If there is a function somewhere else, like that labour-day long weekend, they gladly let visitors join in.

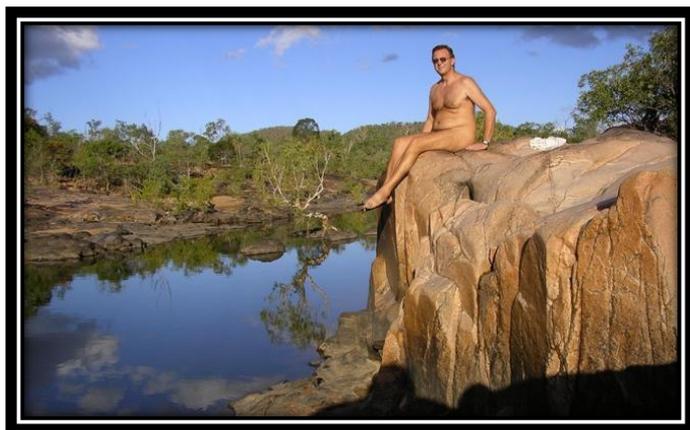


That outing was held at **Emu-Creek Holiday Station** a giant working cattle station on the way to Chillagoe, 2½ hours drive west of Cairns. The owners, Liz and Don are club members of Barrier Reef Sun club as well and run a B&B with 6 rooms and they have more than enough space for tents or camper vans on their outback holiday station. Unless there is a group-booking, Liz and Don can usually accommodate naturists and non-naturists at the same time, as their property consists of an impressive 186 km<sup>2</sup>, so campers can be sent to different valleys. If you prefer to stay in the B&B rooms, nudists might be asked to respect other guests in the building, if there are any - so make sure you ask when booking. Anyway,

only a short distance away from their house, you will find unlimited space and the only gawks are their 300 cows on the property. By the way: if you think 186 km<sup>2</sup> is a big cattle station for only 300 animals, ask Liz and Don about their "big property". That one holds 3'000 cattle on almost 2'100 km<sup>2</sup>! But there are still bigger farms Down Under and you must understand that the land is very barren and dry and the cattle out there is of a drought-resistant breed, which bless Aussies with great steaks but not with milk.

Emu-Creek Holiday Station is the real Australian outback: beautiful red soil, dry grass and termite hills, bigger than man. The many Eucalyptus trees smell very intense after the occasional rain. Depending on the season, Emu creek that flows through the property, can become a torrent fast moving river or reduce itself to a band of a few waterholes that are not connected anymore. When the water level rises, it may have rained somewhere else only. It is unbelievable how dry the land is out there, especially as Australia's tropical region is so close. When we were there, it was the end of the rainy season, but the creek barely flew and the water was not deep enough to swim, even though it was on most places quite wide still. The polished rock and the many trees in slanting position, way up the river bed, were clear marks of how strong this creek becomes at times.

It would have been absolutely worthwhile to go to Emu Creek Holiday Station just for its scenery alone, but it was twice as interesting to meet all the members of the Barrier Reef Sun club for their function. We were amazed to find ourselves amongst 60 people and we had never before seen so many nudists together in Australia for three continuous days. Lillian & Murray were not the only club-members that owned a small naturist place. There were others, who just closed their B&B or campground, if there was a club happening they wanted to attend. If they had guests, they rather motivate them to join in. Among them were Pat & Dave who run Kaikea Bed & Breakfast near Cairns.



In the afternoon, the club organized cricket and croquet games, plus in the evening and morning various jummy communal meals for which every hungry mouth paid a contribution, in order to raise funds. The same was the intention of a raffle and quiz that earned the winners a price. As most of the questions were about Australian TV and sports, we were of no help at all, our only contribution was to name our group "Roving Spirits". More than half of the members we met, were born overseas but they were all Aussies by now. There was a relaxed atmosphere where people sat and talked together under the shady trees and those who preferred, could go for a walk or enjoy to sit on their campsite. As it got cooler here at night than down on the coast, the owners lit a bonfire and those who wished gathered around in a circle, continuing to exchange stories. A fair share of them had been on European naturist grounds and what surprised us even more: we

talked to 7 club members, that had been working on some Pacific islands. It was a big bunch of very interesting people coming of all walks of life.

On Monday afternoon, we left with many happy memories, back to **Lillian & Murray's place** in Cairns and were very thankful, that they had booked us in to this happening-weekend.

It was just the perfect place for us, where we based ourselves again for the next three weeks in their beautiful "granny flat". After intense travelling, it was just great to have the privacy of an own studio-apartment with such a big covered patio and the best of all: we didn't need to wear clothes and all this, only 10 Min. drive away from downtown Cairns, with all its cyber cafe's, Restaurants and Swiss Bakeries.

Here we caught up with our travel diary about our Micronesia trip and completed our story for Naturist Life, so there was not too much time to relax, although you might think, that's all we do anyway. Another thing we were not too lazy to do, was baking our own bread up. Often we made it right from scratch and sometimes we baked some dough we had bought in the supermarket. Thanks to Lillian and Murray's offer to use mandarins and lemons from their trees, we squeezed some healthy juice daily.

One weekend, we drove up to Kuranda, where the **Barrier Reef Sun Club** has their facilities and we enjoyed meeting the members again. The club has a big lawn and a river flows through the forest, which is also part of the property. There was a very nice and well equipped open-sided clubhouse. Electricity is produced by solar power and if the batteries are fully loaded, they are capable of running the 240 V neon lights in the clubhouse and the also very nice amenities bloc for 40 hours. Hot water for the showers was made with an open fire underneath a water filled barrel. The hot water pipe runs in several loops through that hot water in the barrel, before reaching the shower. The Aussies are really "clever Vegemites"! We truly enjoyed it to visit the club and chat to the hospitable bares again.

During our stay, the Australian Radio ABC, came to Lillian & Murray's house for an interview with some of the members of Barrier Reef Sun Club. The members promote that way naturism among the younger Australians, which certainly is a good thing. The interview was recorded in the morning, and already on the same afternoon we could listen to Lillian, Margie and Dave's voice on ABC, they did a very good job!

We had some cooking evenings with Lillian & Murray and we also got invited by some new friends we had made at Emu Creek. Margie & Neil were so generous to let us use their computer to edit our photographs and we got even invited for dinner.

## Naturist sailing cruise to th Great Barrier Reef

Another evening, we went to Pat & Dave's [Kaikea Bed & Breakfast](#), 25 minutes north of Cairns, where we were invited along with a dozen other people to an Aussi-style BYO BBQ. They also organized for a nude sailing cruise for their guests and were still looking for participants to join in, as the boat needs 6-8 people to sail. Of course, we were quite tempted...



... and after Dave finally managed to convince the skipper to run the **nude sailing cruise** even if only Tineke and Wim, the Dutch couple who stayed at Kaikea and the tow of us participated, we couldn't resist to prolong our stay.

By the time the boat lifted anchor, also Glennys & Peter, Margarit and Dave himself, all members of the Barrier Reef Sun Club, spontaneously joined in. So we were a group of eight sharing this experience with Cheryl and Bob, the owners and skippers of the 13,5 m yacht called "Bittersweet", for whom it was the first time they run a sailing cruise with nudies. But they didn't get distracted by their unclad crowd and still steered the boat very professionally.

It was a blue sunny day but on the way out, the sea was a bit rougher than normal, so Heinz felt the urge to feed the fish but all the others were all right. Whilst enjoying some muffins and tea we approached a tiny sand island in three hours under full sail. There was time to snorkel on the Great Barrier Reef, to swim or just stay on the boat and wait for lunchtime while moored in calm waters.

Dave from Kaikea, who had organized this nude cruise and also Glennys, had a different opinion about BYO, so both brought big skies (iceboxes) containing food enough to easily feed more than just the 10 people on board. Those who still could move after that big unexpected feast, were afterwards brought to the little sand island by dinghy.

After another hour, the "Bittersweet" set sail again and we were gliding back to Cairns under strong winds (and waves). At around 4:30 h all the Aussies and also the two of us who had gotten used to the warmer climate, felt it was becoming too cold to be in the "raw" so we hopped back into our cloths again. Tineke and Wim from the Netherlands could enjoy their birthday suits for another two hours, as they are not yet spoiled by the warm temperatures. It was already dark by the time we reached the harbour and said farewell to the others who had shared with us this great naturist outing.

## The red continents North and West:

### To us, by far the best, is the North und the West

Presently, we were at the top of Australia's densely populated coastal triangle from Adelaide east, along the coast to Sydney and then up to Cairns. As this is the area where almost 90% of Australia's 20 Million people are living, most of them in the 4 biggest Cities Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, we had quite a good insight in to the real Australian way of life. As this is not the area with most of it's natural wonders, we took quite often the opportunity to relax and just have a good time.

**B**ut now, we are going to explore that 80% of this giant continent, which is only inhabited by about 11% of it's population, almost 1.5 Million in Perth, and the other 700'000 literally doted over a sparsely populated landmass consisting of Western Australia (33% land, 1.9 Mio. people), the Northern Territories (20% land, 200'000 people) and the very sparsely populated western parts of Queensland and South Australia. We're going to the red center and the coastal stretch from Cairns up to Darwin and via Broome down to Perth.

This is the most unique part of the country; the giant section tourists think this is the true Australia! This is also the land of the remaining **aboriginal peoples**, who got mistreated and slaughtered often in the name of god during the colonial times!

This is the land of their **dreamtime**, the land of their holy sites Uluru und Kata Tjuta (Ayers Rock und the Olga's), Ubirr Rock in Kakadu, Purnululu (Bungle Bungle's) and some other great National Parks, many also with a strong spiritual meaning to Australia's Indigenous people.

This is also the land of the never ever, lonely stretches of road through the "middle of nowhere" with giant road trains with three trailers thundering along streets with no bending for hundreds of kilometres and remote mining communities that dig up Australia's many natural resources. Here we'll find beautiful gorges, bottle trees that adjusted so well to the climate, that they store water in their trunk, wild flowers that survive almost without water and animals that migrate with the seasons. We will probably get close to emus, kangaroo's and even crocodiles. If this is the last time you hear from us, you might think we came too close.

As we like nature, this is the area; we loved the most on our last trip. But from a naturist point of view, it's not an area with many facilities. About 80 of the country's clubs and resorts are situated in proximity to the 4'500 Km stretch of coastal highway from Adelaide via Melbourne and Sydney up to Cairns (including the ones in Adelaide and Cairns), but we know only of 2 (**two**) along the much longer 10'500 Km stretch leading from Cairns via Darwin and Broome to Perth and then along the south coast via Albany and Esperance to Adelaide!



## The Savannah Way

As we didn't want to stay in Lillian & Murray's Granny flat until we reach that age, we finally moved on at the end of May 2005. From Cairns we planned to follow mostly the "[Savannah Way](#)", which leads to Broome. At first, we drove through the green hills of the Atherton Tablelands, mingling with uncountable rental-campervans exploring the villages and plantations of the area.

Only after the turnoff westwards to the Outback, we left them behind. Still, it was by far not as lonely as an over-anxious local had predicted. Instead of meeting one car every 5 days, we encountered about 10 fifty meter long Road-Trains and twice as many cars towing caravans within the first two hours. The first night out bush, we stayed in a swag-tent village at [Undara](#), which is famous for its **lava tubes**. There were about 100 Tourists assembled for the night and most gathered around the bonfire, watching the slideshow offered by the resort. The city-guy conducting it obviously knew less about the animals he showed, than some of his audience. As the peak of the tourist season was still a month away, there was hope he would make use of the time for improvement.

## Karumba: a little village on the Golf of Carpentaria

On the next day, we continued west to Normanton and then up to **Karumba** on the Gulf of Carpentaria. The scenery changed from hilly bushland to light wooded eucalypt forest and then to drier savannah with only small shrubs and golden grass. There were heaps of small termite hills in various colours and shapes. Just before reaching the sea at Karumba, the landscape became very flat and swampy marshland dominated.



Over big stretches, the road was only single-line sealed and therefore small vehicles as ours, had to drive to the side and leave the bitumen, when a big **Road-Train** came along. For them it would have taken so much more time to break and for us it was also safer, as they would only wrap us in a cloud of dust and flying stones, if they would need to go off the road with their 20+ left wheels.

We were amazed to see that today Road-Trains often haul 4 trailers and in some states up to 6 are now permitted, but most still towed three. On the populated east coast, you never see them at all, only in the interior and in Western Australia.

Truck drivers told us that they hate the winter because then, many retired Australians from southern states take off with their caravans to spend the winter up north. They are often not very used to driving with the trailer, drive slow and hesitate to leave the bitumen to make space for the Road-Trains. As the truckies prefer to avoid encountering them, they often drive at night, when they only encounter big numbers of Kangaroos and cows on the road and this results in an incredible amount of road-kill. For many big birds the carcasses lining the road, provide such an easy prey, they often become victims as well while feasting too carelessly on the road, because sometimes there is no car approaching for an hour but sometimes there are 5 cars in 10 minutes.

The Norman River-mouth at Karumba is teeming with [Barramundi Fish](#), so it's not surprising that many fishermen come to compete with the crocodiles to catch a "Barra".

This big fish, which is only allowed to take home if its size exceeds 75 cm, is not only delicious to eat; it is also a very unique specie. It can live in fresh- and in saltwater and if at sea, each male transforms himself into a female within only one month at the age of about 5 - 7 years and then lives on (more?) happily to about 20 years old.

The fishing village of [Karumba](#) usually has 600 inhabitants, but during the Australian winter, they are joined by several thousand mostly retired Southerners staying over winter in the 12 large caravan parks. It's almost like a mini-Costa del Sol, but without the summer tourism, without that infrastructure and without nightlife. People here like to go to bed early; several times we had seen campgrounds organising BBQ and life entertainment

for their guests, starting around sunset at 6:30 h and unbelievable to us: by 8 o'clock the merry crowd had already dispersed back to their caravans.

There was a popular seafood restaurant that required booking, as it was usually full by 6:30 pm. After we had asked if it was possible to make a reservation for the next day at 8 pm, we were told that this is no problem any night, as only a few foreigners want to eat that late and all the others will leave by then.

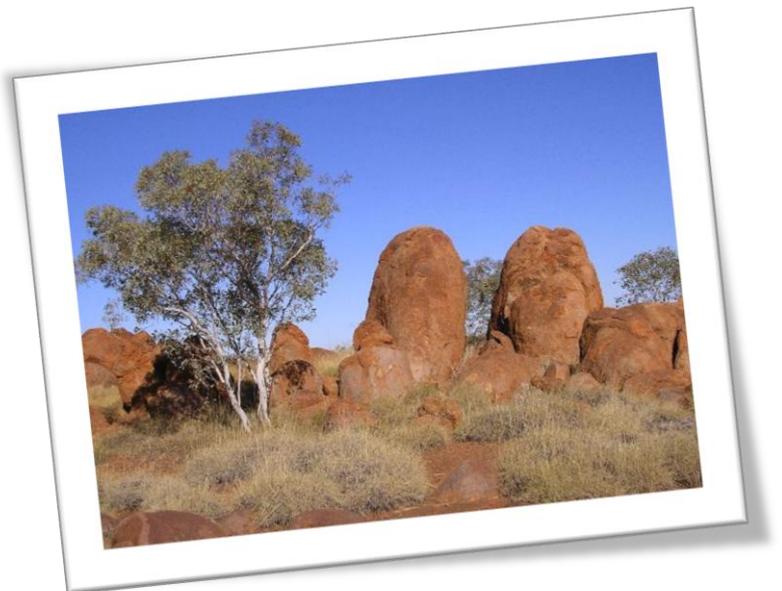
## Lonely places and fascinating Nationalparks in the interior

As we couldn't get any reliable information on the road condition of the unsealed section between Normanton and Borroloola, we decided to detour via Cloncurry, Barkly Roadhouse and Tennant Creek. On the first section till the Northern Territories' border, the landscape changed its appearance quite often and was pretty amazing with many red rock formations, hills and termite hills of brown, ochre, white or red earth glued together. Only afterwards the road straightened and the land became flat with only a few small trees surviving. The days were cloudless but not hot; maybe around 26°C, but the nights were starting to become chilly, so we wore long sleeve sweaters.

At **Barkly Roadhouse**, our tent which we had bought one year ago in Canada finally got the honour of being pitched up for the first time due to the fact that all cheap accommodation was already booked out - but it was a cold night!

In **Tennant Creek** there were three Backpackers Hostels, which was surprising for a small country-town in the middle of nowhere. Due to the construction of the new Adelaide-Darwin railway line, the village had grown to almost 4'000 inhabitants, many of which were of Aboriginal origin.

From there we visited "**the Pebbles**", red round rocks dotted around the landscape. They looked like a smaller, but still impressive version of the famous "Devils Marbles" 100 km to the south. Having reached the very centre, we now turned north from Tennant Creek. Our next stop was at **Daly Water Roadhouse**, which stood alone but attracted many road-warriors with its campground, cheap beds, good food and nightly entertainment. It's original pub was decorated with items from all over the world, including walls covered with foreign banknotes, old horse bridle and bras hanging from the ceiling, giving proof of wild nights passed.



Deep fried chips, fish and chicken wings or burgers were still predominant all over the Australian countryside, but for those who preferred something healthier, the food-situation had greatly improved. Simple but hearty country-fare was now available almost everywhere - even here in the lonely Outback. Those pre-manufactured and triangle-packed sandwiches had almost disappeared from the shelves in favour of freshly custom made ones. We wonder, whether this might be influenced by the many Europeans coming here for a working holiday. They made up the majority of the workforce we've met in remote roadhouses. Daly Waters employed up to 13 young foreigners during their peak-season. The government now grants almost all Europeans, Canadians and Japanese or South Koreans below 26 years of age, a one year working-holiday permit. These allow the tourists to stay for 2 months on each job and they get now reasonably well paid. As the Aussie economy is booming anyway, the generous issuing of such working permits to young foreigners killed two birds with one stone, as seasonal jobs like in tourism or the fruit-growing industry can now be filled easily and the black market of illegal underpaid employment disappeared over night.

After the English, Scandinavian and German speakers; now also French, Italian and Spanish can often be found working in restaurants and it seems that they leave some of their culture on the plate; as we got served three times crusty baguettes in restaurants employing French "working-holidayers" and one fish & chips shop did even offer to serve its fish grilled, instead of battered and deep-fried only.

As the Savannah way joins the main road in Daly Waters, sure enough we met an Australian who had just travelled the unsealed road we initially would have liked to take. He said it had just been graded and was now smooth as silk and that the unsealed sections were in better condition than the sealed ones. Too late for us!

We noticed that Tourist-Offices today discourage non-4WD vehicles to use unsealed roads at all for fear to be held responsible. Twelve years ago, we were normally advised of how good or bad a road-condition was and if a dirt road was heavily corrugated, we were normally told to "fly over it" at 80 km/h and crossing a creek was daily business, even on sealed roads. To get adequate information you need to find some travellers who just drove along a road before you. This is just another example of how exaggerated product liability - here on services - works to the disadvantage of the majority.

Big signs marked the way to "Stuart Tree", which should have been a tourist attraction. What we found, was an fenced old tree stump with a sign reading: "*The Explorer John Mc Douall Stuart is presumed to have carved the initial "S" on this tree on 23.05.1862 during his successful journey from Adelaide to Darwin*". Typical Australian historic attraction!

Our next stop was at **Mataranka Hotsprings**, which is a real oasis in the otherwise dry and barren land. Around the water, there was suddenly a jungle of tall greenery with many sand palms and pandanus trees. Further north, we stayed in **Katherine**, from where we visited Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park. There were 13 gorges separated from each other by rapids and carved out by the Katherine River, which begins in Arnhem Aboriginal land. Despite the sizzling heat up on the plateau, we went for a long hike in order to get to some spectacular lookouts.

## **Kakadu Nationalpark: fascinating nature paired with Aboriginal-Culture**

Then we reached **Kakadu** National Park; highlight of the North. It's one of the few world heritage areas that had been listed for both: cultural and natural heritage and it covers an area of 20'000 square kilometres (half the size of Switzerland). It belongs to the Bininj and Mungguy Aboriginal people and is leased to the government for use as a National Park who manages it together with its original owners who partly still live a traditional life off this land. We got the impression that the indigenous people were now a little bit better integrated than on our previous visits, but it will never be possible that they will want to have the same life, since their culture is so totally different of the western way of life.



Their inherited knowledge of how to take care of the land and the animals is just impressive; they haven't done any damage to the land in the 30'000 years or however long they were around; in contrary to the white men who destroyed and made extinct so much, including many Aboriginal tribes within only 200 years.

Proof of the long history of Aboriginal cultures can still be found in many caves or on rock faces that have been used by nomad people as shelter and where they used to paint their "stories" on rocks.

Today it's proven that the indigenous people suffered even more losses because the missionaries forced them to wear cloths which helped to spread disease even more, as they were not used to wash their cloths and the skin couldn't sweat the disease out anymore.

In the National Park and also elsewhere, controlled burning of the dry grass is now being carried out at the beginning of the dry season, as otherwise uncontrolled fires lit by lightning would destroy everything at the end of the dry season; flora and fauna and often also settlements. The Aboriginal people are right; fire is nothing, it's just cleaning up but it brings new life all over. Many times we have seen how quick patches that had been burned recently, turned green again and there was much more growth and animal life than in the old dry patches next to it. In a controlled and short fire (called cold fire), most animals can escape to nearby that are left to be burned next year. Those animals that can not escape soon become the fresh roast of those who survive.

Beginning of June, sunshine was almost warranted and it was hard to believe that only two months ago most of the land around us was part of one big flood-plain and therefore under water. Among the many tours on offer in Kakadu National Park, we chose a sunset-cruise on the "Yellow Waters". In a slow barge we could see an amazing variety of birdlife and some big saltwater crocodiles in and around the swampy river. Here in the National Park, at least everything was kept natural, with no additional frills to give the adventure hungry tourist some more thrills. Just off the National Park at Adelaide River, a tour operator trained the wild croc's to jump out of the water by feeding them chicken on a rope. Since then, nobody can go fishing and boating on that river anymore, as the clever reptiles would now also jump for a sandwich that is eaten in the boat or for the fish caught. Of course, if a jumping croc attacks a human being, the croc' will be shot - instead of the tour operator who taught it.

On our barge in the Yellow Waters, we came through a beautiful Lilly pond behind which the tour guide found a way through a forest of big paperbark trees that were standing in knee deep water. She explained that this area will dry up very soon and all the animals will have to contend with just a few waterholes before the next wet season starts in November, and many will die when the water gets hot and evaporates altogether in the end. As it was about 35C hot during the day here, we tried to get up early and did various walks. We visited many viewpoints, walked through wetlands that had just dried up, around some billabongs that were beautifully fringed by carpets of white water flowers, up to some interesting rock formations and to rock-paintings where an Aboriginal Park Ranger explained the art.



## Darwin

After 3 days we moved on to Darwin and had now travelled 3'500 km since we left Cairns 14 days ago. **Darwin** recently had grown quite a bit and therefore had lots of modern architecture. Unfortunately, they replaced the Asian-style open-air food court, where everything was prepared fresh and could be eaten on tables placed in the centre. As a substitute, they invented Mindil Beach market that was held twice a week after sunset. To us, it felt just like a big tourist trap with about 250 souvenir stalls outnumbering the 60 food stalls by far. Apart from the fresh fruit salads, most food was pre-cooked and mainly deep-fried. There was no sitting area at all, why some Australians brought along their foldable chairs and tables. Obviously, it was not meant that you come here for a meal - better people had just a quick feed and continued shopping. We preferred to walk back to the city centre and sit down in a Vietnamese Restaurant, where we waited for the fresh food we could order without being pushed by other elbows and fears that the ketchup from the fries-eating people behind us would land on our clothing.

## Top End Naturist Retreat

As Casuarina Beach, Darwins nicest, also has a legal and well signposted nude beach, we soon found our way. We enjoyed the wide beach and the warm water, now as the danger of jellyfish was at its lowest. There were not that many other people sunbathing but after 4 pm the naturists became less and the gawks more.



After four days in Darwin, we went to stay for a week at [Top End Naturist Retreat](#), which is located 70km to the south. This place was amazingly crowded for Australian standard. You guess why? Another place where people, about 30 at the time we were there, spend a warm winter away from their colder homes. The property was quite "bushy" and had many tracks for nature walks among the eucalyptus and [cycad trees](#), sand palms and huge termite mounds in various shapes.

Afterwards we went back to Darwin in order to have our car serviced, as this hadn't been possible to arrange sooner, due to a long weekend. We also discovered some more sights of the city, like the Stockhill wharf with a long jetty, where we didn't find a boat harbour but a former warehouse that's now been transformed into a food-hall. So here, the locals went "en masse" to sample exotic dishes from all over the world now. We happen to be there in a perfect moment; when the sunset colours reflected on the water on one side of the jetty and a rising full moon on the other.

Thereafter, we drove back to Katherine and from there; we continued westwards passing through Gregory National Park with its astonishing red rock walls visible from the main road. Before entering Western Australian territory, we saw the first bottle trees, which are also called Boab Tree here. Especially very old trees have fascinating belly shaped trunks and their branches can point downwards like arms, which is best visible now in winter when they loose their leaves.

## Western-Australia

Due to quarantine restrictions, there was a border check-point for traffic entering WA. They made sure that nobody carried fruit or vegetable and plants and they checked in particular that no cane toads hitched a ride on vehicles or camping gear. This introduced poisonous toad specie became already a pest in all the eastern states and it has caused many animals to die in water and on land due to its poison. People try to catch it and hold its spread and it is common practice to freeze them alive.

## Highlights between the WA border and Broome

We based ourselves in Kununurra for a few days and visited Hidden Valley National Park and Lake Argyle, a huge manmade lake that allowed the dry desert to become fertile cultivated land. Many kinds of fruit and vegetables can be harvested in a season, the plantations in the southern states are hibernating.

What we considered the top highlight, were our two visits to **Keep River National Park** just over the border back in the Northern Territory. Its astonishing sandstone formations like giant bee-hives resemble the more famous Bungle Bungles, situated here in the Kimberley area as well. Apart from the main area with heaps of these rock formations linked together, there were also various areas where single cones could be seen standing in the landscape.

Further on, we stayed at **Halls Creek**, which had a large Aboriginal community. While we were checking in at the Motel, we watched an Aboriginal taking an ice-cream and a frozen Kangaroo tail out of the same freezer and asking for the price. The Thai lady that was a new employee at the counter, looked at him in disbelief and asked: "really, you want to buy this?" Then she looked at us, smiling all over her face. Then the Manager (from Monaco) arrived and explained to her, that this was a standard item, selling for 10 dollars. Well, the customer found this was too dear and handed the furry tail to the Thai lady, who almost didn't want to touch it, until the Manager told her to put it back into the ice-cream freezer.



Later, we saw two local foodstores selling the same item for \$ 7 - 9, depending on its size. Obviously, in the outback white people have adapted to the local habits and demands of the indigenous population.

On the other hand, the Aboriginal imitate some of the bad habits of the white, like drinking too much. Unfortunately, their bodies have even more difficulties absorbing alcohol than already the bodies of the immigrants have and therefore they get in bad shape much quicker and deeper. Australian society rather accepts drunken whites than drunken blacks.

At least many elders of Aboriginal communities wanted to fend off the bad influence alcohol brought into their villages and therefore banned it, creating some peaceful "dry communities". Wouldn't it be a good idea to create dry villages for other people as well?

We continued to **Fitzroy Crossing**, where the roads divide to Windyana Gorge with an abundance of freshwater crocodiles sunbathing along its sandy river. We were there on our last trip but unfortunately this time we couldn't make it as heavy rain damaged the unsealed road two weeks ago so badly, that 14 4WD vehicles and 2 tour buses had to be towed out. Re-grading of the road was not completed yet and so we had to continue straight to **Derby**.

Here we saw particularly many huge termite mounds and also boab trees. The most pictured bottle tree is probably "prison tree", because "it is assumed" that prisoners had been locked into that hollow tree if they were being transferred to Derby.

## Broome

On July 2, 2005 we arrived in **Broome**, which had become a popular beach-holiday destination. Therefore it was almost impossible to find accommodation in the middle of the Australian winter- and the European summer-school holidays. Even camp sites and dorm beds were solidly booked out for days and weeks. Today, even for some older Australians and Kiwis it became popular to book into dormitories, which they reserved six months ahead. After numerous phone calls, we finally were lucky because somebody had cancelled his cabin and so we could get it for a few days. Afterwards we could stay in a nice over-flow cabin on the same campground, so that we finally stayed for over 2 weeks.

Broome had become quite touristy, even though it was still a small village and "low key" in comparison to some beach resorts on the east coast, where high rise condominiums dominated the skyline. However, judging from the amount of flights you could believe otherwise. The busy airport was located almost in the middle of the village and the planes could be watched at close range from the mainroad and from the beach.



Everybody flocked to Cable Beach and most of them drove down in their cars. A 17 km stretch was "cloth optional" and only there it was allowed to bring the car, but not to the small patrolled beach. Therefore, the real Aussies didn't have an option: they had to go to the nudist beach, although most of them could hardly bear it, that others bared it all.

Another special character was added by the daily camel rides for tourists.

## Mining-towns and fascinating Nationalpark in between

We left Broome tanned in a kitschy golden brown as our favourite cookies. Then we drove for 600 km through boring flat country down to equally boring **Port Hedland**. As most residents now had moved to South Hedland, there were only the big industry complexes left that handled the shipments of iron ore. Giant ore-trains carried the valuable rocks from the mining sites several hundred kilometres inland in the Pilbara Ranges to the coast. From Port Hedland big ships were being loaded and the cargo was dispatched out to the world, with China apparently being the best customer.

Now, we went to visit **Karijini National Park**, for which we based ourselves at Auski Roadhouse. There were some amazing gorges carved into the hills, not visible from far away, so suddenly we stood on the rim and looked down. The national park department had made some gorges accessible by building steps down to the gorge-floor, where only little water flowed right now. We could follow the stream for kilometres on the flat stones beneath the red cliff walls.

The second day we walked along some little waterfalls that fed several green ponds on different levels, before reaching the depth of the gorge.



After that, we stopped in the mining town of [Tom Price](#). This was only one of many places in the Pilbara Ranges, where 2,5 km long ore trains were loaded to bring their cargo to the shipping ports of Karratha or Port Hedland on the north west coast. In huge open cut mines, mineral rich mountains were transformed into holes the same size. [Mines in Australia](#) harvest for example: gold, copper, iron, asbestos, lead, uranium, diamonds, and much more.

## Along the West-coast from Exmouth to Kalbarri

For the third time, our witch had to Hoover us 600 km further in one day to reach the next place, as there were only roadhouses in between. This time to [Exmouth](#), which had been established only in 1967 to support a naval communication base. Today, however, it makes a living mainly with tourism, except the plumber who had the following slogan on his service vehicle: "your shit is our bread & butter".

The reason why Exmouth draws so many tourists is the [Ningaloo Reef](#), which is 250 km long and lies only 100 Meters off shore in some parts. The area is now declared a Marine National Park and the plankton released by its coral attracts Whale Sharks and Humpback Whales. Further, Manta Rays and Sea turtles are abounding. Some very colourful fish could be seen, while snorkelling, but the current was too strong to make it safe to approach the coral. While we were sunbathing on Mauritius beach, we could see several Humpback Wales passing by in the distance and some giant turtles regularly stretched their heads out of the water. As already on the way to Exmouth, we encountered again some Emus on the Caravan park, where we had rented a cabin. They quietly stalked through the grounds, inspecting if something interesting was lying around the tents, before disappearing in the bush again. At the tourist office, a lady explained that there was also a smaller bird very similar to the emu and this one is called Bustard - not Bastard!

About 50 km after leaving Exmouth, carpets of wild springflowers appeared on both sides of the road. First there were only blue Hoveas, a pea flower but later they mixed with white and yellow everlastings and the pink Schoenia. Heinz couldn't count how many times Brigitte wanted to stop and many other by passers did the same in admiration of nature's colourful display.

This area was around the Tropic of Capricorn, which meant the climate further south was not affected by dry- and wet season but got more moderate. It was also quite obvious how the landscape became greener and we could feel how we were approaching the winter as nights got quite chilly.

Next, we stayed at [Carnarvon](#), a pleasant little town with lots of orchards and thus, tomatoes could be bought at 1 dollar per kilo instead of 7-10 as everywhere else.

We visited some impressive Blow holes a fair bit out of town. Especially at high tide and in stormy weather, the waves crushed on the cliff of the rock-plateau forcing their way up through some holes in the rock and appearing like cold geysirs in front of the astonished tourists.

On our way to Denham, we saw a "Thorny Devil", a little lizard-like animal with a thorny looking skin. This protected it from snakes that otherwise would be its predators, whereas he lives of ants.

Then we stayed in [Denham](#), which was a pleasant touristy seaside village on Shark Bay. A few houses were built of "bricks" that consisted of shells only. There were some shell beaches nearby, where little white shells, most of them no bigger than 1 cm made up an 8 meters thick layer of shells only, with absolutely no sand in between. Salt and the weight of new shells that were constantly washed up on top, glued the lower layers firmly together. So the first white immigrants started to saw big blocks out in a quarry and built houses from them. As long as nobody scratches on these shell walls, they last quite long.



Of course, we went also to [Monkey Mia](#), where dolphins regularly appear on the beach. Each adult mammal got rewarded with up to 2 kg of fish per day. We learned that this is only a small snack from them, as they need to eat approx. 12-15 kg of fish each day. We were lucky to see two mothers and their calves and it seemed as if they were as curious to look at us, as we were to see them. On that same beach where the dolphins came in, we also saw quite a few big pelicans.

Shortly before reaching Kalbarri on August 1st, the landscape changed very suddenly from wild bushland to green hills and farmland with different flowers again.

Also [Kalbarri](#) had become a popular seaside holiday destination and there was a very attractive National Park by the same name ([Kalbarri National Park](#)) to be visited. Parts of it lay inland around some gorges of Murchison River and others on the coast. We hiked to a rock arch called "nature's window" in Z-Loop Gorge high above the riverbed. Equally exciting were the lookouts and walks along the spectacular coastline with sandstone cliffs in many colourful layers.

From one of the viewpoints, we could observe two Southern Right Whales playing in the river mouth about 150-200 m away. We heard, it was a mother with her small calf and that they had shown up regularly at that spot for a month now.

In Kalbarri, we could finally find a mechanic who was able to find the reason why our car started to shake at high speed. It had only taken him one hour to replace the part, but three days until it was delivered. However, the Mechanic's nerves were probably more stressed than ours, as the courier delivery failed in its first two attempts.



## New Ditty Garden

Six months ago, we'd discovered on the pin-board at Elephant Rock a small note from somebody who intended to open a naturist place in [Geraldton](#). We contacted the people by e-mail and now Olly and John welcomed us as their very first guests at **New Ditty Gardens** in the village named Walkaway. As their newly planted fence still needs some time to grow, they plan to open officially in about 1 year's time, by when some additional facilities for campers should be completed and promotion under way.

We enjoyed their in-house accommodation and Olly's delicious home cooking after a good soak in their spa. So we had a wonderful time with this interesting couple who had dropped out in their late forties and who received us as if we were their longtime friends. Thanks to John's knowledge of wildflowers, which only just started springing up in this area as well, Brigitte got some valuable tips before we headed on to see some more.

## Wreath Flowers & other botanic highlights

Not too far from Geraldton, in Mullewa, we were lucky to find the very rare and beautiful **Wreath Flower** that never grows two years in a row on the same spot. There were some locals admiring the signposted round patches as well and they told us they hadn't seen any here for 7 years.



Afterwards we drove along some pastoral hills that were covered in wildflowers too, but on the coast and south of here, not many flowers were out as yet. In the afternoon, we reached Western Flora Caravan Park in **Eneabba**, where we could join an interesting tour with good explanations on local plants. We learned how clever plants work to attract insects to pollinate their flowers between male and female species, and the way how insects, often of only one kind, were attracted by the nectar offered by a plant as reward for fertilisation. It

was interesting to hear how the continuation of the food-chain works; if an insect specie becomes extinct, there might be a plant that will not be able to get seeds without it and thus extincts as well and vice versa. We learned of plants that rely on small marsupials like Mini-Opossums, birds like Kolibri or most common; on flying insects or ants.

But there are also plants and animals that eat each other entirely. On the property of Western Flora, the guide showed us three species of insect-eating plants which we wouldn't have noticed, as they were small and unspectacular in colour. However, after he'd put them under a microscope we could see the magnificent details and clever systems of how they attract prey and reminders of caught insects became clearly visible. Many insect-catching plants drown their victims in a sticky liquid before they suck them out as a spider would do it with its feast. Who thinks still that plants are no living beings? It's so obvious how they are an integrated part of the food-chain with the whole circle of catch and prey. Judging from how strongly a plant reacts on its environment, we believe that it has feelings, including well being and pain, but it is just not able to run off and scream as humans and other animals can.

## Pinnacles desert at Nambung Nationalpark

Continuing our trip; we drove along the coast down to **Cervantes**. Nambung National Park with its magic **Pinnacles** desert was the big highlight here. There were thousands of peculiar limestone pillars or cones standing in golden sand. In some areas, they were just small but others could tower up to 5 meters. Some seemed very solid but others had holes like Swiss cheese. The shapes were so diverse, we had to venture from one to another and still had only seen a small part of them. As the sun went down, their colour became ever more golden; we had to delete the last few pictures as they had become too kitschy!



Further south, we climbed the huge and impressive white **sand dunes** of **Lancelin**, which were surprisingly close to houses. We had the hole dunes to ourselves and we loved to see the windmade sandpatterns with only our own footprints.

But hordes of people come here for sand-boarding and the Aussies like to dash around the sand in their 4WD vehicles and motocross bikes, making the dunes look like abandoned skifields. Seems there must be good business in towing those who get bogged, as there was a fair share of advertising placed along the entrance by companies that offered to recover vehicles.

## Perth und Fremantle

From there it was only 130 km till we reached Western Australia's capital **Perth** (1,5 Mio inhabitants), superbly situated on Swan River. On our last trip, this had become our favorite Australian city and we loved it again this time. Recently, we had met several tourists that were disappointed because every shop closes at 5:30 pm and the center becomes quite lonely and they couldn't find a decent restaurant scene. This was true for most of the city, but these poor buggers hadn't found their way to Northbridge. There, some shops never close and there was plenty of nightlife for those who need it. An abundance of restaurants caters for every budget and taste and especially on William Street, it looked almost like in Asia. Here many eateries offered incredibly good authentic Asian cuisine and this often at prices barely higher than in Asia. Some tourist-restaurants in their home country certainly charged more for food, that tasted probably not as authentic as what we were served here in Perth. In one occasion we were reminded of our friend Gusti, who used to get almost a bad consciousness when the price - value ratio was too much in our favor, but still; when we paid the bill, the Indonesian owner gave us a 10% discount on that already cheap meal.

By the way: Indonesia is closer to Perth than the big Australian cities in the east and children in WA are being taught the Indonesian language at school.

During the 9 days we've spent in Perth, the weather has not been too friendly, but after seeing pictures of floodings in Switzerland that even reached Australian TV, we knew, we were much better off. Luckily, when we left, the sun spoiled us again and so we were glad we could enjoy the cooling of our car's newly re-gazed air-conditioning.

Down in the south of Western Australia, temperatures were now usually between 15-23 degrees C during the day, but fell often very close to freezing at night. Heating and good insulation was not common in Australian houses as in good old Northern Europe and therefore were often quite cold during the night. Maybe because summers get very hot, locals here seem to concentrate much more on cooling than heating their houses. They

became kind of resistant and even on freezing cold winter-evenings, we still saw quite a number of people; young girls and old blokes alike, walking barefoot in the streets and in shops. As we continued our trip on Aug. 18, 05 we made a small tour inland from Perth, visiting the tidy towns of **Toodyay** and **York**. Driving towards the first one, our car got wet feet. Only 60 km out of the big city, there was a river to be crossed - just as we did here 12 years ago and with all the water that had come down last week, this floodway was about 20 meters wide, which made Brigitte's hair rise even higher than last time - but we managed!

We then returned to the coast and stayed two nights at **Fremantle** just south of Perth. This place is very popular with the cityfolks for dining out and enjoying nightlife, as it has a wonderful atmosphere with all its old fashioned and well restored buildings and its nice harbour area.

## South-West coast between Fremantle and Albany

Driving along the coast, we were quite amazed how populated this area became in the meantime. Apparently this is Western Australia's fastest growing region and many people are relocating permanently to their previous weekend-destination.

**Dunsborough**, where we stopped, looked the same. We stayed 3 nights, at a very cosy Youth Hostel with a relaxed atmosphere, right on the beach. In the evening the 20 or so, guests gathered around the logfire after cooking and Paul, the Manager shared stories with us all.

From there we went hiking to **Cape Naturaliste National Park**, which offered beautiful views of the rugged coast and dozens of sealions could be watched from a view point high above on the cliff.



Continuing south, we explored the region around Margaret River. There were several caves that could be visited and as **Mammoth Cave** was the only one offering a self-guided tour, whereby we were given a tape-recorder along the way, Brigitte was happy to choose this one, so no tour-guide would push us through too fast. It was a really big and impressive cave. Overnight, we stayed in a luxurious hostel in **Augusta**, one of the few places that really deserved its award title "best hostel in Australia" and didn't just put it up themselves. Afterwards, we drove deeper into tall timber country with its impressive Karri, Marri and Jarrah-trees that can grow quite old and big here. Some of these Eucalypt have survived many forest-fires and some had trunks that had burned out inside but remained standing and still had some green branches. The biggest we have seen, were approx 5 meters in diameter, so you could park a car in the black hollow butt. As this region is quite wet and green in winter, there was thick moss growing on old trees.

Overnight we stopped **Walpole** and **Denmark**. The little village of **Denmark** had also become quite touristy. In this area, there were countless beautiful beaches and sand banks in the most stunning colours as can be found only in this area with an incredible turquoise glooming in the sun.

We also visited **Porongurup** and **Stirling Ranges National Parks**, climbing castle rock with many balancing rocks on top. Our next stop was at **Albany** from where we could visit some more national parks. The big natural bridge and the coastal scenery near Frenchman's Bay, were among the highlights of the **Torndirrup National Park**, which was concentrating on beaches and amazing coastline.

As many parts of south Western Australia had been discovered and named by French many places still reflect this as for example: "**D'Entrecasteaux NP**" or "baie des deux peuples". Unfortunately they didn't settle and open restaurants as in Québec..



Very impressive was also the wide variety of flora on the coastal hills. On approaching them, it always looked as if there were only small bushes growing, but at closer examination, we discovered that those were actually very different plants almost on every lookout where we stopped. Many of them were now in blossom and there were unusual flowers like the one that looks like Christmas candles on a pine-tree branch or the sturdy coneflower of the various Banksias that consist of hundreds of single flowers that make up one big "church candle".

## Southern Rights Whales

Upon leaving Albany, we had a look around **Bremer Bay** with some more beautiful coastline and bays and in one we were lucky to sight a whale mother with her calf.

Overnight, we ate and slept very well at Jerramungup, before heading out to [Fitzgerald River National Park](#), which was only accessible on its western- and eastern parts. The centre is closed for the public, in order to contain a plant-disease called "dieback" and every visitor is asked to clean his shoes at the start and end of each walking track. There were no shoe-cleaners at service but at least the National Park put some tools at disposal.

There was a viewing platform at 'Point Ann' from where the tourists regularly can see whales between June and October. We were lucky Buggars too; there were 7 Southern Right Whales 16-18m long and we believe each of them had a tiny calf (4-7 m) playing around it. Sometimes they would wave with their flippers whilst rolling to the side. We are glad that these gentle giants are now widely protected and we learned that their population is growing again after all the years of being hunted around Australia, which now protects them completely and earns now much more money with the tourists that come to watch the whales. The next day, we explored the parks' eastern part, admiring its beauty along the scenic Hammersley Drive, down to the cliffs with leaning rock formations on the beaches just before **Hopetoun**, and that's where we stayed overnight at the Hotel.

Along our way, we came across a very special plant, the Royal Hakea, that looked like outgrown cabbage and had hard leaves in green, orange and yellow succession from bottom to top, which could be up to 5 meters high. Further down, there were

In **Esperance** we found a very nice Guest House, which was almost like a B&B, but with kitchen facilities, just like every other Backpackers Hostel and breakfast with freshly baked bread was included in the low price. From there we visited **'Cape Le Grand National Park'** where we sighted another whale with a baby that came as close as 5 m to the rocks. There were again some stunning turquoise beaches and rocky round granite boulders that made up a scenic coastal setting.

As the weather finally changed from sunny and cold to sunny and warm, we were very pleased to be able now to take advantage of those beautiful beaches that also surrounded Esperance. As temperatures rose up to 28 C, we didn't need any cloths anymore. In Esperance, this heat only lasted two days, but as we left just when the rain arrived, we could follow it another 4 days.

## Nullarbor Plane: even more whales



Before reaching the Eyre Highway at Norseman, we passed by some white salt lakes and then, we started the long journey across the [Nullarbor Plain](#) driving for 1'200 km through "nowhere land" over to South Australia. No sooner had we turned onto that road, we spotted 3 wild camels on the roadside. What else shall we say about these long hours of monotonous drive? Very soon the flat landscape became very dry, the number of bushes along the way varied, but for a while it was quite an empty plain, living up to its Latin namesake "nullus arbores", which means treeless. The road was very good but boringly straight, every 100 km it was a bit wider with additional

markings and the sign announcing that the next couple of kilometres could be used as emergency airstrip for the RFDS Royal Flying Doctor Service. There were not many long road-trains, as only up to 36,5 M vehicles were allowed. A lonely roadhouse offered food, fuel, beds and camping about every 80-180km.

**Eucla**, just before the border to the state of South Australia, had ruins of a telegraph station that is gradually being buried by its surrounding sand dunes. Soon thereafter, the road came closer to the coast and soon there were no sand dunes anymore, but 80 m high limestone cliffs. For the next 150 km there were many spectacular look-outs as the road followed close to these cliffs.

However, the scenery was not the only attraction; from almost all points where we stopped, several whales could be seen close to shore. But the best was yet to come: after our second night, this time at Nullarbor Roadhouse, we reached the **Head of Bight**, here, the national park dept. had built a **whale-info centre** on the Southern Right Whales that assemble here every year. Large viewing platforms had been built, from where paying tourists could see whales. Having seen so many already, we were considering whether it would be worthwhile to pay the 8\$ entrance-fee, which we did in the end. Although we had expected to see more animals than before, we were still stunned by the large number of Southern Right Whales that gathered down there. The National park dept. had counted 138 in that particular bay, of which 52 were born here this year. They give birth, feed and play until the calves are fit for migration to cooler waters and too big for sharks. It was really incredibly fascinating to watch so many of these amazing creatures - we could have stayed all day, as some would always give a bit of performance below the view-point.



## Southern-Australia's westernmost part

Back on track, the scenery changed again; about 330 km into South Australia, it got greener again and there was farmland everywhere, so we felt we had already left the uninhabited area of the Nullarbor before reaching the village of **Ceduna** with 2'000 people. We then followed the Eyre Peninsula's west coast and stayed overnight in Streaky Bay. On the campground where we rented a cabin, there were many pelicans impatiently waiting around the fish-cleaning shed.



Further south, we admired the unique rock formations named 'Murphy's Haystacks', so called because these about 7 m

high granite blocks stood out on the hill, owned by farmer Murphy. We also enjoyed some more spectacular coastal scenery with again different shapes of cliffs and inlets. The most impressive were at Venus Bay, Elliston and Kiana Beach. Shortly after we had seen the last look-out, dark clouds and rain from which we had managed to escape during the last 3 weeks, finally caught up with us. After these intense and eventful weeks, we were rife for a rest and so we were delighted to find a nice little holiday cottage for rent at **Port Lincoln**, where we did nothing but eat, sleep, let the bad weather pass and wrote a bit more on our dissertation...



A few days later, when all cottages held reservations, we had to move on and so we drove along green farm hills for 350 km up to **Whyalla**. We were a bit disappointed about how ugly this iron-ore town looked like, but never the less, we tried to find accommodation as it would have become too late driving to the next place. This prove difficult however and we've asked around 10 different places, but all were booked out by workers currently laying a pipeline for iron-ore. Just before heading on, we found a cheap hotel which was mainly visited by alcohol- and gaming addicts. They still had a grabby room but we didn't mind as it spared us of driving on, now as the night had fallen.

## The Flinders Ranges

Already the next day led us to another highlight: The [Flinders Ranges](#). Driving through the park, especially after 4 p.m., felt like on a safari. Especially Emus, Kangaroos and Wallabies were abundant. Caused by heavy rain during the previous days, some gravel roads in the National Park had become swampy and were therefore only kept open for 4WD vehicles. After a night at Wilpena Pound, we drove up to **Parachilna Gorge**, which was open to all traffic, even though we had to cross the river at least five times in our car, as the track followed that river below the beautiful brick-red gorge walls. Just when we wanted to leave the park on the main-road, Heinz thought we should check and see whether the other off-roads had miraculously been opened again. And really: the miracle had happened: on the turn off, the "4WD only" sign had been removed during the time we had crossed the other gorge. This gave us the chance to explore the famous Brachina- and Bunyerroo Gorges and to our car the biggest challenge it probably ever faced.

During the next three hours, we drove about 25 times through a creek and several times we doubted whether the river followed the road or whether we had missed the turn off and wrongly kept just following the river-bed. Sometimes it could take several hundred meters till we reached dry ground again. We resisted the temptation to capture this adventure on a picture, as we were worried to get stuck if we stopped. After passing the gorge, the road led up to a crest called "Razor Back" which offered beautiful views down. Some proud 4WD-owners admitted they were quite impressed, watching our "small 2 WD car" braving all this water.

Further south, we stayed two nights in **Quorn** after which we visited [Alligator Gorge](#). Ordinary hiking boots and not a car were required to access this narrow and impressive red gorge. About 250 steps led down to the floor. Similar however was that the track required several river crossings, so this time we got wet feet and not our car.

## Holiday-cottage near Maslin-Beach; Australia's first naturist beach

After driving through Clare valley and the large grape growing area of the Barossa valley, we intended to stay overnight in [Hahndorf](#). However, as we arrived on a weekend, all accommodation had been taken. This pretty tourist village, less than 50 km from the city of Adelaide attracts weekenders to wine and dine - and afterwards they are not fit to drive home. Well, better they stay than go on the road.

We finally ended up staying in Adelaide where we managed the next day to organise a holiday cottage. We spoiled ourselves with a 3 weeks holiday to end and digest our Australia trip. It was very near Aldinga's beach in a wild and beautiful bush setting. It was refreshing to see that in this area with many holiday homes, every house had its own distinctive character, unlike in Switzerland, where strict construction laws want to force each owner to design his house to look only slightly different to its neighbouring houses.

Whenever it was warm enough, we headed for Maslin Beach, which was superbly located beneath sandstone cliffs that had many layers of different colours. Up on the carpark, the wind was sometimes freezing cold but at the foot of the cliffs it could feel so much warmer, if we found windshelter. We were lucky that the highest cliffs were on the nude and not on the prude side, thus protecting those with fewer cloths better...

Even though our friends Zebet & Peter were just moving house, they reserved a night to host us in their new property, which we liked even better than their last home.



## Selling our car in Adelaide

After 3 weeks at our holiday retreat, we moved to stay at the OZ Backpacker's place in [Adelaide](#) for a last week in order to organize the continuation of our trip.

In the meantime, we have progressed a bit closer to modern life; we bought a mobile-phone. We were quite surprised, to find that even a cheap 40 Euro mobile phone is capable to connect to the internet. We could really download our yahoo e-mails, which appeared in a primitive but readable mini-version on that small screen.

The reason why we bought it, was to be reachable when we put an add in the paper, to sell our car. Unfortunately, this wasn't the immediate success we had hoped for. Sure, we admit, at first we put in quite a high price, remembering the mechanic that once had told us, this car would sell like a "hot bun" and the even higher price, dealers asked for the same type of car.



It seems that Australians (just like Swiss) rather pay twice or triple the price and buy from a dealer, than from private.

After three weeks, we were still driving to Maslin Beach with it, telling ourselves, we would sell it to a dealer on the way back.

However, it happened twice, that somebody would ring just minutes before we reached a garage and wanted to see it. Finally, some new immigrants from Sri Lanka became the new owners,

although we realize that we had pressured them a bit when we said: "you can get it for 1'800 \$, but then you've got to make up your mind immediately".

Considering that we had paid \$ 2'600 for our Camry almost one year ago, we shouldn't complain, as most of the money spent for the car was in maintenance rather than repairs - she's been a really good "witch" to us!

## Another four days in Melbourne

Now we were free to leave and we immediately looked for a cyber-caf?to book a flight to [Melbourne](#) for the very next day.

There we just enjoyed to spend another 4 days in the hustle and bustle of this very cosmopolitan city, mixing with the tourists during the day on the scenic spots and mixing with the locals at night on Ligon Street or China Town in the Restaurants. For the first time we got our drinks served with a straw each, whereas in most places in Australia only the women drank with a straw - blokes drank straight from the bottle (of piss).



## Final thoughts

Now, after almost one year, our Australian trip came to an end. Summarizing: It was just great to travel around this country again and it was not difficult at all, to join into their easy way of life. The diversity of the landscapes, as well as flora and fauna were absolutely impressive. The same can be said about the contrasts between the densely populated coast in the east and the vast and almost uninhabited land in the rest of the country.

It doesn't matter from which part of the world the people have initially immigrated; the Aussies are very friendly Mates and together with the Aboriginals, they form a new and tolerant nation. It was great, that they have shared their continent with us.

The many Australians that have travelled to Europe, have probably noticed as many peculiarities about us, as we did about them, we only wonder what they would be ...

Brigitte & Heinz



[more pictures on our Homepage](#)

