

Adelaide to Melbourne

From Adelaide we are driving east until we get to Sydney. We picked up a car on Saturday morning (April 15) and after climbing the Adelaide Hills, we were in another very dry and flat region. At first we thought we were back in the desert but in fact much of the land had been harvested of its grain and it was the residual stubble that looked so dry. There weren't many trees, however, and not much green to be seen.

After about an hour we left the main route to Mt Gambier (where we would spend the night) to dip south to the coast road. This was not part of The Great Ocean Road that we would follow later as we travel east but we were able to see the ocean for a few miles. For a while we were at sea level and hugging the coast but for the most part we were separated from the water by huge sand dunes with a little brush-type vegetation.



For most of our journey we were still very much in farm land with grain predominating but we saw more and more sheep and cattle as we traveled in a northeasterly direction. We also saw hills off to our left (north) and for the final 20 miles or so the land was very heavily forested. Clearly it was planted for future harvesting but it was a significant change in vegetation and certainly in color.

We had a relatively short drive on Sunday (poor planning!) so decided to spend a little while in Mt Gambier before moving on to our next destination. It turns out that we found several interesting sites and it was about noon before we left the city.



Mt Gambier

First, Mt Gambier has a number of fine buildings, including the city hall and a number of hotels and civic buildings. Many had wrought iron balconies that we have seen in many stops in Australia so far. So, it was interesting to spend some time strolling the main streets.

Perhaps even more interesting and certainly unusual are the several sink holes that have developed over

the years right in the middle of town. The area sits on thick limestone (formed as a result of an earlier inland sea) and water seepage down cracks has led to significant underground erosion and the occasional collapse such that a deep hole suddenly formed in the earth. Two of these that we saw were about 100 feet deep and both had been developed into public gardens with stairs and walkways down to the bottom of the well-landscaped hole. One of them in fact had been the garden for a large home built near the hole. The home has since been demolished but the beautiful garden still exists.



In another part of town there are two lakes, each resulting from volcanic activity relatively recently – perhaps less than 4000 years ago. The one we visited – Blue Lake – is a smaller version of Crater Lake in Oregon and apparently is a very deep blue in the middle of summer. It was still clearly blue today but beginning to transform to its winter gray. It has a circumference of about 3 miles and a water depth of up to 250 feet so is no small hole. It also provides the city's water.

Within 20 miles of leaving Mt Gambier as we headed south we crossed from South Australia into Victoria and, in so doing, lost 30 minutes! It was a beautiful drive through rolling farmland above the Southern Ocean, of which we got the occasional view as the road neared the coast. The grain and dairy and sheep farm land looked very much like many parts of Southern England, although the fields were larger and the trees uncommon to our eyes. There were huge herds of cattle and fields filled with sheep which, together with several large forest plantations, made for a very scenic drive.

We spent Sunday night in Warrnambool, a small seaside town that was our introduction to the Great Ocean Road which we started early on Monday.

The Great Ocean Road spans 250 Km between Warrnambool and Torquay but not all of it hugs the ocean. For perhaps a third of its length the road cuts inland and climbs to several hundred feet above sea level and the scenery changes completely. Inland there are steep climbs through conifer plantations and the ever-present eucalyptus, as well as broad hillsides of grassland. In other places the road travels through farm land and, as we saw yesterday, could be Southern England or even the rolling hills near our home in Ohio. It really is wonderful scenery and on its own



would be well worth the drive. It is the ocean view, however, that attracts the visitor and this must be one of the most spectacular and interesting Oceanside drives in the world.

It is unlike Route 1 in California in that it runs essentially at the same level (except for the inland portions mentioned above) about 200 feet above sea level and there are dozens of easy access points to overlooks of interest. The vast majority of these are concentrated in a 30 mile stretch and it is here where the tourists are most prevalent – especially on a beautiful holiday as the one we were experiencing.



The coastal views also differ from those in California in that there are many more off shore “islands” and rocks which have been eroded by sea and wind into some very unusual and fascinating shapes. Many have been given names (The Twelve Apostles, London Bridge, etc) but the attraction is in the rock formations, their color and in the manner in which they were formed – and continue to change.

We stopped at all of the overlooks on this most popular stretch and walked for a few yards or as much as ½

mile at each to get the views from every vantage point. The walks themselves were generally quite flat on a hard surface so access to the cliff side was usually quite easy. By the end of our sightseeing day, however, we had walked several miles and we still had over 100 Km of driving to reach Melbourne. Fortunately this was via a fast motorway but it was after 7pm when we checked into our hotel in the middle of town.

On Tuesday we started our day of sightseeing in this city of 4 million population. Melbourne is yet another Australian city founded on gold and in fact was the site of the biggest gold rush in the world in the mid-1800s. This wealth not only brought a lot of people here but it also facilitated the construction of some very beautiful buildings, many of which are still standing, often tucked in between tow ultra-modern skyscrapers. These latter are of every conceivable design and, thankfully, are not simply glass and steel boxes. In fact, the variety reminded us very much of the new city of Shanghai, although Melbourne is generally much more open and has a lot of green space.

The city offers a Visitor Shuttle bus service around the middle of town (\$7.50 for two days) which provides a good way to get an overview of the city itself but convenient transportation between areas of interest. Melbourne also has an excellent tram service and, again, the central city loop is designed for tourists and is free of charge.



***The original
Railway Station***



On Wednesday we took the first bus of the day and used our tickets purchased yesterday. We rode as far as the Botanic Gardens and the Shrine. The latter is a huge building built in 1934 to honor those lost in World War I. The names of all the war dead from the State of Victoria are listed on books kept inside the hall and the inside is relative-

ly simple but moving. Nearby this place to commemorate “the war to end all wars” are sadly – but inevitably – addi-





tional memorials honoring those lost in World War II and all subsequent conflicts. Next Wednesday is ANZAC day on which Australia honors its war dead and this site is planning services and parades beginning at dawn. Presumably we will see similar activity when we are in Sydney.



The botanical gardens provided a pleasant contrast to the Shrine and we strolled through the Australian forest and camellia section and beautiful grassy areas before having a cup of tea and returning to the bus. This time we got off at Federation Square, which is the main meeting place for locals, and walked to the river where we were just in time for a one hour cruise on the River Yarra through the center of the city and to the docks. It was a very pleasant way to spend an hour and we got a different view of the buildings of the central business district.



To get back to the hotel we took advantage of the free tram which runs around the center of the city in both directions. We chose to take the “long” way round and so saw many of the parks and major civic buildings once again. It was a great way to complete our two days of sightseeing in Melbourne. Interestingly, Molly had brought her diary that included what we saw here on our first visit 10 years ago. Although we repeated a number of the sights from last time, it is interesting to read just how much more “per hour” we were able to do when we were ten years younger!

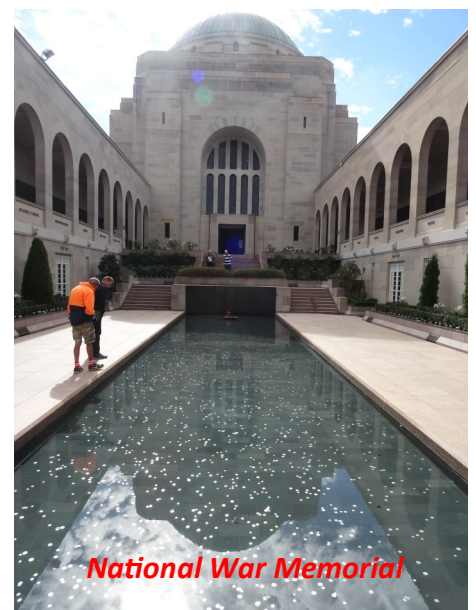
On Thursday we had a long drive (over 400 miles) to reach Canberra. It was a very pleasant drive through some gorgeous countryside – with the emphasis on “country”. Apart from the two small towns we stopped at (and these were a few kilometers off the motorway) we saw no other towns and were driving through farmland the whole way. We were also driving up and down some hills and reached an altitude of about 3000 feet, although we saw mountains to the east that were over 5000 feet. At this time of the year none were snow covered and all were brown with some shades of green right to their tops. The region was labeled “Alpine” so we guess that there are some winter sports in the area.

Although we didn’t capture much in pictures we both commented that the rolling countryside was at times English and at times more like the foothills of northern California. Molly said it best when she said that “nothing looked unfamiliar”. Again, a beautiful drive on a lovely warm day with clear blue skies most of the way.

On Friday we took the Hop on/Hop off bus, a 90 minute tour of this city built specifically to be Australia’s capital and which would highlight most of the civic buildings.

We got off first at the National War Memorial, which is similar in construction to the one we had seen in Melbourne but is quite a bit bigger. Again, it was a rather somber place to be but it is very well presented and a fitting memorial to Australia’s war dead. The huge domed structure also contains the tomb of Australia’s Unknown Soldier.

The memorial sits on high ground and is in line with both the new and old parliament buildings and a long mall, similar to that in Washington DC. This is perhaps not too surprising as the design of the city was made by an American, who won a competition in the early 1900s as the city was chosen for the capital of the New Federation. Apparently both Sydney and Melbourne wanted the new capital so Canberra was a compromise. The city was “built from scratch” and so could incorporate any design and could be laid out to any plan far more easily than building in already established cities.



Today Canberra is still a relatively small city of 300,000 and sits in the Australia Capital Territory, an area of Federal land given by the state New South Wales. The ACT has similar autonomy to that of the Australian states and, as such, bears another similarity to DC.

From the War Memorial we went to the new Parliament Building, a structure completed in 1988 in a very modern design. Again, an American was one of four architects given the job and he settled in Canberra for the rest of his life – which ended just last year. We did a self-guided tour of the building with its Senate and House chambers much like any US Capitol. In fact, the



The New Parliament Building

From the new parliament building we walked down the “mall” to the old building. This older and much smaller building (built in 1927 as a provisional building with an expected occupancy for 50 years) had run out of space in the 1970s and, on completion of the new building, was to be demolished but a plan was put in place to save it and create a museum. Today the old chambers can be toured and a section that was occupied by the prime minister and the cabinet has been left as it was when vacated in the 1980s.

parliamentary system here seems to take equally from the British and US forms of government, with House representatives having some measure of proportional representation and the Senate having an equal number of senators from each state regardless of size or population.



The 1927 Parliament Building

On Saturday we completed our stay in Canberra on an educational note. We decided to take a drive to visit the Canberra Deep Space Tracking Station, about 45 minutes out of town. On the way we saw a turnoff for Mt Stromlo which had been the site of observatories since early in the 20th century. An astronomer had convinced the new government that this would be a perfect site for studies of the galaxies and one which could concentrate on sightings from the southern



hemisphere. He was so successful that the observatory site was integrated into the plans for the Australian Capital Territory.



A devastating bush fire in 2003 destroyed most of the site and necessitated a re-think of the mission for this area. Today it concentrates on collaboration with similar sites and universities around the world and specializes in the fabrication of parts necessary for celestial observation. It seems that nowadays, observation time can be bought on virtually all telescopes around the world and computer technology allows the collection and analysis

of data at any site. Canberra has a world-wide reputation and scientists here received the Nobel Physics Prize for its work on assessing the rate at which our galaxy was expanding.



At the Deep Space Tracking Station about 30 minutes further along the road there are several huge parabolic telescopes (several have been decommissioned) that have been, and continue to be, vital to the tracking of (mostly NASA) deep space probes and are currently monitoring the path of Juno as it orbits Jupiter after a five year flight from earth.

Both facilities had excellent movies and interactive stations and the observatory had a self-guided walking tour of the mostly burned out facilities that have been maintained as a “museum” to the work carried out here over the past 100 years. To top it off, the hilly scenery was magnificent and we saw some lovely autumn colors on a warm and sunny day.



Now it's on to Sydney for our final six days in Australia, so we plan on one more post from there before returning home on April 29.