

Australian Trip

June 20-July 15, 2012

Wednesday, June 20, 2012

The excitement begins the day before we leave when United cancels our flight from San Francisco to Sydney and books us the next day out of Los Angeles (overnighting in San Francisco, of course). Call United and get rescheduled for the 20th again, but this time through LA. (This was actually when and how we wanted to go, but it was more expensive.)

Becky takes us to the airport and everything goes fine. Even though we have a single flight number from ORD to SYD, we have to change planes in LA. What's the deal with a through flight?

Pacific ocean flight features poor food, a child who screams for the entire flight, and unmemorable movies. I don't watch them and Jan's earphones don't work well enough for her to watch them. Still we get to Sydney. (It's now June 22 here.)

Friday, June 22, 2012

Customs is a breeze as is the transfer to the Qantas terminal (they run their own shuttle bus!). The flight to Cairns (rhymes with "pans") is uneventful. "Snow White" is the movie and the food is unusual but good. (Yes, you get a meal!) Arrive in Cairns, take the prepaid bus to the hotel, check in, and take a two hour nap. Walk the Esplanade to downtown and stop in the tourist information area. Get tickets to take the train up to Kuranda and the skyrail back. Eat a light dinner on the waterfront, get a gelato, and hit the hay at 8:20.

Saturday, June 23, 2012

Up at 6:15 and have breakfast in the hotel. Bus picks us up and takes us to the train station. Train up to Kuranda (eat your heart out, Bob). Train stops at Baron Falls which is disappointingly dry and at Kuranda. Shop Kuranda. Find a nice bracelet for Jan at the first jade shop, but do not buy it until the end of the day. Town is mainly tourist junk shops with a few nice places (mostly clothing) thrown in. Many places are closed or unrented. Economy must be bad here too! Enjoyed the aboriginal art gallery a lot. Finished tour with a rain forest walk (found a black bush turkey on the trail). Walked through town a bit and headed for the skyrail (actually a long gondola ride). Stopped at Baron Falls again and at Red Peak. Walked through the rain forest at both places. There were supposedly orchids here but we didn't see any. As we head into the skyrail station at the bottom of the ride, see cockatoos fly across skyrail path and see Blue Ulysses Swallowtail butterflies in the tops of the trees. Return to the hotel by bus and head downtown to plan the next day's activities. Find the tree where the egrets and the ibises spend the night. More and more just kept coming in. It was amazing. Along the Esplanade, find another tree filled with a multicolored parakeet-like bird. Also see a black form of a

reef heron along the Esplanade. Got advice from the tourist information bureau that the seas were going to be rough tomorrow (10 ft waves) and that we should probably postpone our visit to the Great Barrier Reef until another day. Decide to go to Daintree instead. Eat at a pizza place, have a gelato, and head for bed.

Sunday, June 24, 2012

The wind is too great to go out to the reef. Rent a car and head for Daintree river area. Get out late and renting the car takes forever. However, we are finally on our way. Arrive at Mossman Gorge after a beautiful drive up the coast highway. New visitor's center. Part of the park (with the long walk) is closed. However, enjoy the walk through the forest and along a rushing creek. Too many people to see much wildlife. The forest is very green. Find an orchid plant (no bloom) and then spot more. Have lunch in the visitor's center and head for the river cruise. Try to take the first boat cruise, but that one is full (want to take the solar powered boat). Reserve space on the last one and kick around the town of Daintree for an hour. There is not much a town, but we still kill time there. Find Ulysses butterflies all over one plant and try to take pictures of them. Then head for the cruise. See various sizes of salt water crocodiles, from hatchlings to full grown females and still growing males. Do not see dominant male (Scarface). Also see striated heron, great white heron, azure kingfisher, green tree snake, and green tree frogs. Head back to Cairns stopping at Rex Point for a cold sunset view and Palm Cove for dinner. Return to car and head for bed. Tomorrow is too windy for the reef also. Pooh!

Monday, June 25, 2012

Stay in Cairns today. Have a leisurely breakfast and walk along the boardwalk photographing birds along the way. Went to the regional art center (only half open and only half price). Had an exhibit of a modern Australian artist and an Australian who took the pictures of the backs of heads in Afghanistan. Found out how to catch the bus and went to the Cairns Botanical Garden. Had lunch in the garden's café and walked around. Bussed home, napped, and bought a bird book. Did wash while we happy-houred and had dinner at the Balinese restaurant in the hotel. Packed for tomorrow's flight to Darwin.

Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Randy heads for Green Island for a half-day of snorkeling. It is not the outer reef, but the next best thing. Jan is afraid of the wind and the bumpiness of the ride, and stays back. On Green Island, everything is extra: \$4 for corrective goggles, \$12 for the wet suit. Go to the area where the lifeguards are. Spectacular fish, some coral, totally enjoyable. Also walk around the island and see people kite surfing. Meanwhile, Jan stays back, walks the Esplanade, has lunch, shops, goes into the indigenous art gallery, and worries. We get back to the hotel, have happy hour, and go to the airport. Have dinner there. Flight is delayed by one hour. Oh, well! Get an extra dinner on the plane. Get to Darwin, rent a car, and get to the hotel without a problem. Super small rooms! Lug our luggage up two stories.

Wednesday, June 27, 2012

Head off to Kakadu National Park. Scenery is vastly different from what we expect. Flat. This is the area of annual flood. Wetlands abound. Stop at Wetland's visitor center but don't stay too long. Stop at information station and get park passes (\$25 for each of us). See cockatoos in the trees - boy, are they noisy! Get to Jabiru around lunchtime. Go to bakery for lunch. Then check into hotel. Hotel is shaped like a crocodile. Drive up to Ubirr and see the rock painting. Wonderful! Hike to the top of the hill and view the escarpment. Return to the hotel for canapés and drinks on them! On way back, we spot a jabiru (actually four of them - we see them take off as I back up the car to show Jan!) and a dingo.

Thursday, June 28, 2012

Lazy around the hotel until about 11:00. Go to Bowell Visitor's Center and explore it. Find a tree orchid (dendrobium) blooming out front. Then go to Naurlangie and hike up to a vista. Great view, but we were expecting rock art and there were only minimal instances. Then find out we are in the wrong place for the art. Continue down the road to the rock art site. Walk through the stone shelters with the art. Here the theme is wallabies instead of fish and interesting mythical, mystical figures. Climb to look-out and then head to car. Drive to next lookout, but decide that the trail is too tough and that it is too hot. Head for hotel. Go through Aboriginal Cultural Center and gift shop. Check into hotel (room isn't nearly as nice as last night). Buy drinks and have them on the patio. Have dinner at the outdoor bistro (a Caesar salad with way too much bacon and fish). Come back to room and crash. Must be up early tomorrow.

Friday, June 29, 2012

Up with the birds (actually, before the birds) for Yellow water Sunrise Cruise. Lots of birds. Highlights: sea eagle, whistling kite, pied cormorant, jabiru in flight, spoonbill, azure kingfisher, night heron, ducks (lots) and a couple of crocodiles. Have breakfast when we get back. Check out and head for Darwin. Stop to take pictures of termite mound and see black cockatoos as we pull off. In wetlands, see another jabiru (Jan's first on the ground). Get back to Darwin without a problem and check into hotel. Go to the Northern Territories Museum for aboriginal art. Museum has everything: natural history, art, sail boats, etc. Have lunch in café before going into museum and see lizard walking along grass's edge. Go to sailing club for dinner and sunset. Get both. Head for bed. Early flight tomorrow.

Saturday, June 30, 2012

Alarm clock power goes off in the middle of the night. Have to get up and set cell phone for the alarm. Get up at the correct time and get to airport just fine. Airport is mobbed, but we get through in plenty of time (don't get receipt for car though). Nice breakfast on the plane. Take transfer to hotel and check into a nice room. Shop

downtown Alice Springs for aboriginal art. Have a great tandoori chicken sandwich for lunch. Pick up a car and go to the Araluen Cultural Center to look at aboriginal art. Hope to see the craft center also, but it is closed. Go to history and natural history museum. See a galah (what looks like a pink feathered colinda) and a paradise parrot on the way. (Find out in the natural history museum that the black and white ibises that we have been seeing are "straw necked ibises.") Drive to Simpson's Gap a break in the beautiful red rock ridges of the West MacDonal Range. Go to see a black footed wallaby. Don't see any in the first trip through the gap. Go back again, ask people, and finally one comes out to see us. Go to golf course on the way back to check for kangaroos but don't find any. Have a drink in the hotel and head out for pizza. See the end of Hairspray on TV and then get a leisurely night's sleep.

Sunday, July 1, 2012

Enjoy leisurely morning. Check out of hotel at 10:30 and go into town. Have breakfast in an outdoor café. Decide to go back to art store rather than return to craft shop at museum. Decide to buy painting by Gloria Petyarre that was completely different than anything we looked at yesterday. Get it and walk back to hotel to get car. Gas up car and head for airport. Airport is busy but get through in plenty of time. Arrive in Ayres Rock (Uluru) after "tea" on the plane, retrieve our luggage and take the free transfer to the resort. Check into room, check out "town center" (this whole place is one big resort from \$3000/night rooms to a camping area), try to rent a car ("none available"), and get groceries for breakfast. View sunset from viewing platform at hotel. Have pizza in the room, watch a bit of TV and go to bed.



Monday, July 2, 2012

Try again to rent a car and again "none are available." Book shuttle buses to Uluru today and to Kata Tjuta tomorrow. Go to rock and walk on the shady side until 10:00 when there was a ranger walk into Kantja Gorge. Take walk - very informative. Continue on bus walk for a while. Then head for Cultural Center for lunch. Get there just as they were closing, but get two nice sandwiches and fries. Go through center - a bit disappointing. Art galleries are of much lower quality than at Alice Springs. Take shuttle back to hotel and take a nap.

Tuesday, July 3, 2012

After a leisurely morning, go on the Valley of the Winds hike in the afternoon. Go by grass fires on the way in (and out). They are purposely burning the grass to rejuvenate the range. Valley of the winds hike is wonderful, but there are no kangaroos. A German woman and her two younger relatives hike the same route and we overlap. Hard hike and

we don't see much wildlife, but see wonderful vistas. Stop for Olgas photo op on the way out. See wild camels and another dingo on the way out. Circumnavigate Uluru and stop at sunset spot. Lots of people there with all kinds of tours. Head back to hotel and try barbeque for dinner. Randy has kangaroo and Jan has prawns. Both are badly undercooked and cold by the end of the meal. Neat experience anyway. Do laundry and pack for way out.

Wednesday, July 4, 2012

Head for Melbourne. Shuttle to the airport, fly to Alice Springs, fly to Melbourne, shuttle bus to train/bus station, and bus to hotel. Amazingly, it all works except the handle to Randy's luggage is finally broken (it has been coming apart since we landed in Australia). Check in to hotel and have a nice walk by the river to the conference center. Find out there that there is a simulcast seminar from CERN announcing the discovery of the Higgs. We are too late to get in on it. Register and eat canapés for dinner.

Thursday, July 5, 2012

First day of conference. Send luggage to be fixed by taxi (driver is reluctant to take it but does.) Neutrinos all day. Jan is supposed to meet Cynthia Albrecht but misses connections. Tours by herself and spends time in the hotel. Call luggage repair shop at noon - they have suitcase and it is done already. Go to dinner with the Albrechts and the Bardeens to a Greek restaurant. Return to hotel and compute.

Friday, July 6, 2012

Go to conference in the morning. Take free city tram around city and get off on the opposite side to pick up suitcase. Walk back to hotel dragging suitcase. Go to art museum in Federal Plaza to see Australian art. Whole first floor is aboriginal art. See Jan there! What a coincidence. Second floor has aboriginal shields and hollow logs plus some very British looking Australian paintings. Walk back to conference in time for dark matter talks. Jan arrives after her "low tea" and we eat on the riverfront.

Saturday, July 7, 2012

Start morning with LHC and Tevatron Higgs talks. Jan goes to Royal Garden for tour (and gets there a bit late after taking the long way around). Meet for lunch at the gardens and walk around for the afternoon. Come back to hotel, do some wash and find a food court for dinner. After dinner, do some Sudokus (the hard one was really hard!).

Sunday, July 8, 2012

Free day from conference. Get Penguin Parade tour to Phillips Island. Pick up everybody and make it to the lunch stop. There we get a rather mundane chicken sandwich. Buy a hot chocolate and a cookie. Then we are on our way. Go through wildlife park and see koalas, wallabies, Tasmanian devils, wombat (asleep in his enclosure), emus, kookaburras, and kangaroos. Next on to Phillips Island. Walk along the surfing beach. Bus

to the Nobbes at the end of the island where they have built artificial shelters in the hills for the penguins. See some of the "little penguins" (the same species that they call "blue penguins" in New Zealand). We see (not actually see, but get a picture of) a penguin under the boardwalk and then some in the shelters. There are supposedly seals out on the far rocks and we may have seen them, but we can't be sure. On the way back, see swamp wallabies beside the road and in the fields. Then it is on to the "Penguin Parade." Get front row seats in the viewing area (in the sand). After dark see one large group of about ten marches in. Then they came in in singles and doubles. One of the doubles gets confused, stops right in front of us and stares at us before proceeding onward up the hill. On the way out, we see more penguins beside the boardwalk. After the parade, we stop for pizza and head home.

Monday, July 9, 2012

First day of plenaries at conference. Jan heads for Ballarat and sees town's architecture, but does not see mining area. Eat out and do wash.

Tuesday, July 10, 2012

Jan heads off on tour - Savannah Walk About to Youlang Regional Park. There she encounters swamp wallabies, kangaroos, and koalas. Also sees meat eating duck and black swans. Randy sleeps through early sessions and then ride the tourist bus. Back for the afternoon sessions. Dinner at the Curry Vault.

Wednesday, July 11, 2012

Last day of conference. Great talks: neutrinos, dark matter and dark energy. Jan goes to main art museum. Meet for lunch and then off to airport. Plane is cancelled but we are put on an earlier one that leaves about the same time. Arrive in Sydney and take shuttle bus to the Vulcan Hotel. Check in and walk to mainstreet trying to find Thai restaurant. It is closed. Go to Indian restaurant instead. Return to hotel and go to bed.

Thursday, July 12, 2012

Go to bakery for croissants for breakfast. Make reservation for dinner at the Altitude Resurant on top of the Shangri-La Hotel overlooking the harbor. Take free bus downtown and explore the Rock. Have lunch in a French patisserie. See an art gallery next door and go in. Great gallery of aboriginal art. See some of Gloria's paintings there and a lot more. Learn about other western artists and about some northern artists who paint on wood. Walk over the bridge to get a good look at the bay and the opera house. Then take the ferry back from Nelson Point. Have a bit of time before dinner. Go through contemporary art museum. Two floors of works for "Biennale," the city's art festival. Very little we like but a lot of weird stuff (like an exhibit of ~1000 pseudo Buddhas and a hundred painted plastic bottles). Then went to the floor with the permanent collection. Here we see a wall of aboriginal bark paintings that we loved! Finally time for dinner. Have to walk a circuitous route to Shangri-La, but finally get there. View from the

restaurant was everything it was cracked up to be and more. Food was delicious with lots of extras (special breads, a small soup, mandarin gelatin/sorbet "to cleanse the palette," and sweets after dessert). I had guinea fowl and Jan had a vegetable dish. For dessert we had poached pears, chocolate mousse, and "quark" ice cream ("quark" is a type of cheese). Take bus back up George Street and walk to hotel.

Friday, July 13, 2012

Get picked up at 8:30 for tour of Blue Mountains. Stop by river for juice, cookies, and payment. After going through and getting stuck in a major construction area, we arrive at Katoomba Falls. Take skyway cable car across the gorge and see Katoomba Falls quickly out one side of the cable car and the Three Sisters out the other. (We see a lot more of the Three Sisters as we go through the area. Take cable down into gorge and hike through the rain forest on a boardwalk. Take steep scenic railway back up. Lunch in a small town (Laura) and then hike to Wentworth Falls. Both Katoomba and Wentworth Falls were a bit of a disappointment because you would only see them from above and you never got the full effect of the water coming over the escarpment. Walks were enjoyable though they started hurting Jan's back. Next on to Flat Rock at King's Table to see the "Grand Canyon" of Australia one last time. It is so windy that we don't stay up there very long. The on to a sandstone carving of a kangaroo or wallaby. It is in outline form with a spear through it. Guides had poured water into the lines which made the carving much easier to pick out. Race down the mountain to the river cruise. See sunset on the cruise as we head back to Darling Harbor and on to Circle Quay. Disembark and have a pizza dinner. Bus back to hotel.

Saturday, July 14, 2012

Leisurely morning at hotel with croissants, juice and coffee/tea. Walk to Darling Harbor and through a great kid's area taking a lot of pictures. Walked past the harbor restaurants looking for a good "linner" spot. Go through aquarium and see a platypus, a lot of reef fish and animals. Thoroughly enjoy ourselves. Return to restaurant for early dinner (actually get luncheon salmon special with a glass of wine). Take free bus to Circular Quay and walk to Opera House. Get tickets, walk around outside of Opera House, play Sudoku, finally go into theater and hear end of "Opera Notes" while sitting in a small amphitheater just outside upper balcony. Talk ends and house is not open (it actually opens 20 minutes before the production!). We are amazed at the number of empty seats. The inside of the Opera House is quite stark, not nearly as innovative as the outside. See/hear Bizet's "Pearl Fishers." Singing is great, staging and lighting is a little peculiar. Have champagne at intermission to help ease Jan's back pain (good excuse, wasn't it). It tasted good. After the opera, take a cab home and pack.

Sunday, July 15, 2012

Begin the trip home (or to Shanghai in Randy's case). Get up early to catch Randy's plane, but it was delayed until almost the same time as Jan's flight. Get pastries for the delay. After that, each of us goes our separate ways.