

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

November 2000

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Eric and Jean with our 4WD motorhome

(Photo by Craig Hilton)

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Web version: <http://fanac.org/fanzines/Wrevenge/issue56/index.html>

If you're interested in what Eric and I are doing, I encourage you to visit our Australia travel website,
<http://www.avalook.com.au>

The printed version of this fanzine is available for contributions, uncanceled postage stamps, editorial whim, or A\$4 or equivalent per issue (air mail extra). Please read the Web version if you can—photocopying is difficult and expensive, now that we no longer live in a city.

Outback Queensland trip August 2000

by Jean Weber

Eric and I took our first major motor home trip in July and August this year. Eric has written the trip up in considerable detail in his fanzine, *Gegenschein 89*, which Real Soon Now he'll get posted on the Web somewhere and maybe even mail out some copies (he has got them printed).

Rather than duplicate his level of detail, I'm including some brief summaries here, plus photos (Eric doesn't do photos). Most of the photos were taken with my Kodak DC-240 digital camera, but a few were scanned from prints made with Eric's little Pentax camera.

Another version of this trip report is on our Avalook website (see note 1 below). Photos albums are stored on Photopoint (see note 2).

If you've got a map of Australia, I suggest you get it out now and follow along. I've included one on the back cover of this zine. Others are available on the Web. One handy map is on the Queensland Main Roads site; it's where we look up road conditions. See note 3.

Cape Hillsborough

We started out from Airlie Beach on Monday, 7 August, and drove south towards Mackay, stopping for three nights at a "nature resort" caravan park at Cape Hillsborough National Park.

We took several interesting walks, including a boardwalk through the mangroves, a nature trail through various woodlands (with a view of an Aboriginal fish trap), a steep hike up a hill to get great views of the whole area, and a walk at low tide to a nearby island.

We ate dinners at the caravan park's excellent bar and restaurant.

Photo: Wedge Island at low tide.



Clermont & Blair Athol Mine

From Cape Hillsborough we bypassed Mackay and got onto the highway heading southwest to Clermont. There wasn't much to do or see on the way, without diverting from the road.

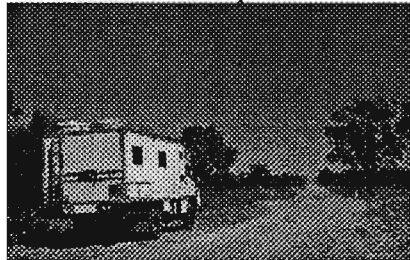
Clermont is in a major mining area, mostly coal but other materials as well. We stayed two nights at the Clermont Caravan Park, which was originally built by the Blair Athol Coal mine for its workers. This explains the unusually well-designed and spacious showers.

The very interesting (and free) tour of the Blair Athol Mine included a stop at the local historical museum, with its collections of old household appliances, and other memorabilia. Eric kept pointing at things and saying, "I had one of those, and you made me throw it out!"

Alpha

We skipped the gemfields (towns with names like Emerald, Sapphire, and Rubyvale) this trip, because the annual Gemfest was on that weekend, and all the campgrounds and motels were full. We could have camped in a field, but we're not keen on crowds, so we decided to come back another time.

Photo: Back road to Alpha



Instead, we drove the back road from Clermont to Alpha, 170 km of crushed gravel, mostly in quite good condition. Alpha is located on the main highway that runs from Rockhampton west to Longreach. It is small but boasts several interesting murals painted on various buildings, including the public toilets. We wandered around a bit, but didn't stay long.

And yes, there is a Beta marked on the map a few km away, but we couldn't find it. We assume it used to be a railway stop years ago.

Barcaldine and Aramac

Barcaldine (pronounced Bar-CALL-din), population now around 2,000, was established in 1886. Several major events took place here, including the founding of the precursors to two of Australia's major political parties. The Graziers Association (founded in 1889) later became the National Party, and the shearers' strike in 1891 led to the formation of the Workers Party, which later became the Australian Labor Party.

Photo: The Globe, one of the six pubs on Shakespeare Street, Barcaldine



In addition to the six pubs on the town's main street, a historical museum, and various other sites, a major tourist attraction is the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, a large and impressive site with several buildings containing displays explaining the history of Australian workers and of the labour movement, including a railway station, school, power station, police, fire, and main roads. They are working on a major exhibit on women at work.

Tom Lockie of Artesian Country Tours was a very audible presence around the camp fire at the caravan park each evening, telling stories and jokes, and obviously very familiar with the history of the entire area.

We were so impressed that we stayed in town an extra three days just to go on his one-day tour to Aramac and nearby areas. We'll be writing that tour up in more detail for the Avalook website, so I'll just say here that we enjoyed it thoroughly and learned a lot.

Photo: Rock wall at a campsite used by sheep and cattle drovers in Aramac area



Note 1. Part One is at <http://www.avalook.com.au/newsletr/oznews17.htm>

Note 2. Album list is at <http://albums.photopoint.com/j/AlbumList?u=1180235>

Note 3. Find maps at http://www.racq.com.au/framesets/0_journey_roadreport.htm and <http://www.travelmate.com.au/>

Aramac was the first town settled in the area. At one stage in the 1800's, some hugely impressive volume of wool was being shipped out of the area on huge horse- or bullock-drawn wagons. Tom Lockie said that Aramac was then as well known as Sydney, and people around the world knew it was in Australia—even if they had no idea where Australia was!

Photo: countryside in Aramac area



Before leaving Barcaldine the next day, we went to the railway station at 8:30 am to see the twice-weekly train, the Spirit of the Outback, come in from Longreach on its way to Rockhampton and Brisbane. We walked through several cars of the train to see the comfortable facilities.

Photo: Spirit of the Outback train



Photo: Dining car on train



Ilfracombe

We stopped about 70 km up the road at Ilfracombe, originally called Wellshot, where for the first time since we left the coast, we could get a mobile phone signal. The 1911 Post Office was also the library, the toy library and the local internet access point.

The tourist attractions included the 1898 Wellshot Pub, which has a daily 40 minute stockman act; and the machinery and heritage museum, which has a long string of heavy machinery stretching further than the town along the side of the road. The small museum itself is made from a station house. They have also preserved a 1901 police cell.

After a few hours wandering around, we continued the 27 km into Longreach.

Longreach

Longreach is famous for several things, and we visited most of the major attractions. It was the first home base of Qantas Airlines (then known as Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd.), which has a small museum.

The Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame is large and well done, tracing the history of outback Australia from the original Aboriginal inhabitants through the glory days of sheep, cattle, and mining, to the present time.

Many events in Australian history, such as the gold rushes, occurred at about the same time (mid-18th century) and in much the same kind of dry, hot countryside as in the American West, so I felt I'd seen most of it before, but the differences are very interesting too.

We also visited the Longreach School of Distance Education (formerly known as the School of the Air), and listened in to a few minutes of live chat between teachers and their young students on outback stations. The facilities for education of children far from any population centres are impressive.

We spent two nights in Longreach, but found the caravan park a bit crowded, so we headed off to the bush for a few days.

Bladensburg National Park

From Longreach we drove northwest along the Lansborough Highway (also known as the Matilda Highway) through gently rolling grassland to Winton, then turned south on a dirt road into Bladensburg National Park. Despite being confused by a lot of 4WD tracks running in all directions, we found the ranger's office (unattended), filled out a camping permit form, then found our way to the camping area.

Surprisingly, no one else was there. It was a very pleasant spot, with one clean pit toilet, but you needed to bring everything else, including water. The campsite was by a rather muddy waterhole, and we could hear the occasional moo and baa in the underbrush, but we saw no wildlife except for quite a few birds (and flies). It was such a nice,

quiet spot that we stayed for two nights, despite the lack of a shower. During the day three vehicles came by but no one else stayed overnight.

Photo: Our campsite at Bladensburg NP



Photo: The waterhole by our campsite



Photo: Surprise Creek, a wide dry bed—no doubt a surprise after sudden rain



On the second day, as we drove back to Winton, we stopped to look at two other waterholes in the area, one in a gorge. We decided against taking the dirt track to Lark's Quarry to see the dinosaur stampede tracks, although they sound well worth a visit.

Photo: Gorge in Bladensburg NP



Winton

The Winton district was settled in 1873 when rural properties, including Bladensburg, were founded. Originally

known as Pelican Waterhole, the town claims that Banjo Paterson's *Waltzing Matilda* had its first public performance on 6 April 1895 in the North Gregory Hotel (which has burnt down and been rebuilt at least twice since then). The first board meeting of Qantas was also held in the town, in 1921. The Bronze Swagman Bush Poetry competition has been held there since 1972.

One of the stranger sights in Winton is Arno's Wall, made of metal, plastic, ceramic and other junk from the tip (dump) held together with concrete. Among other cast-off materials are two motorcycles, artistically arranged. A truly fannish work of art!

Photo: Arno's Wall, showing 2 complete motorcycles embedded in it



Kynuna

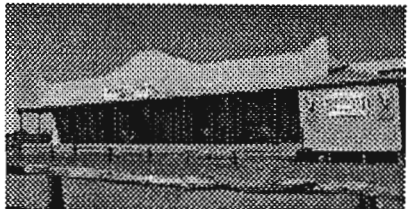
We stopped for the day at the tiny town of Kynuna (population between 12 and 18) and stayed at the Jolly SwagVan caravan park run by the historic Blue Heeler Hotel, where the last brawl of the Shearer's Strike of 1891 was settled. We paused to admire the sign of a blue heeler (dog) with the flashing red neon tongue on top of the pub.

We were one week too early for the annual surf carnival, in aid of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, where lifeboats parade the street, hundreds of kilometres from the nearest surf. (Yet more fannish-style activity!)

McKinlay

After Kynuna we drove to McKinlay, notable only because it has the Walkabout Creek hotel used in the *Crocodile Dundee* movies. Naturally we had to stop and have a drink there. There was virtually nothing else in the town.

Photo: Walkabout Creek Hotel



Cloncurry

On to Cloncurry, on the main road west from Townsville to Mt Isa and the

Northern Territory. Although it's not a large town (around 4,000 people), it was the biggest we'd see for a couple of weeks, so we stocked up on food and fuel. Local sights include a Flying Doctor Museum, an art gallery, a cultural centre, an outdoor theatre, and the Mary Kathleen Museum, containing memorabilia from the closed MK uranium mine.

Burke and Wills Roadhouse

We continued on north, stopping at the Quamby pub for a soft drink, and then on to the Burke and Wills Roadhouse, where we stayed overnight at their caravan park. We had a really nice lamb chop dinner (and a few beers) on their verandah.

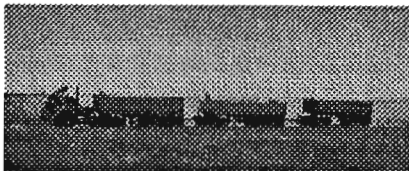
The road north of Cloncurry is a typical Queensland outback road, with one lane of bitumen (blacktop, asphalt) down the middle and half a lane of gravel or dirt on each side. You drive on the bitumen until you get within a few hundred metres of a vehicle coming in the opposite direction, then both vehicles dodge off onto the sides of the road (usually keeping their right tyres on the bitumen) until they've passed each other. Unless, of course, one vehicle is a road train—in this case, it's prudent for the other vehicle to get completely off the road and let the truck have the bitumen to itself.

Photo: Burke and Wills Roadhouse



Although our motorhome isn't as big as a road train, we did notice a tendency for most smaller vehicles to get off the road when they saw us coming—possibly to avoid being hit by any stones we might kick up (surely it's not our erratic driving).

Photo: road train



Gregory River

From Burke and Wills, we headed west, still on a paved road (as described above), crossing the Leichhardt River on a fairly new, high-level bridge, from which we could look down on the old

causeway across the river. As with most rivers in outback Queensland, the water level is low in the middle of the dry season, but you can easily see how high the water gets during the wet, quickly making the causeway impassable.

Eventually we reached the Gregory River, where there was Billy Hanger's general store and canoe hire and the Gregory Downs Hotel. The toilets and showers across the road were a bit primitive. This is not a complaint, just an observation. You get used to corrugated iron sheds after awhile, and it's part of the outback experience. At least the shower water was hot, the toilet flushed, the place was clean, and there was a bench on which to put your clean clothes; what more do you need?

Photo: Leichhardt River as seen from new high-level bridge, showing old low-level crossing.

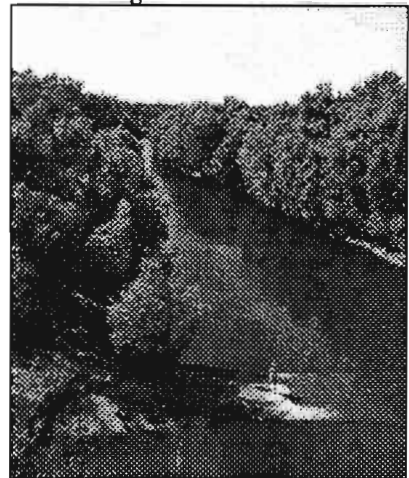
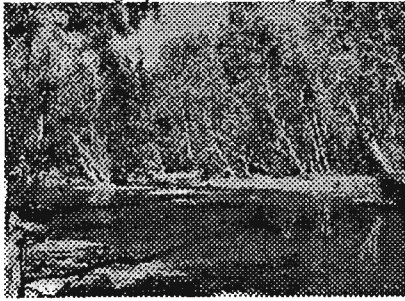


Photo: General store at Gregory River



We'd been told from people who'd stayed there last year that the Gregory River bed (a few hundred yards from the Hotel) was a very nice place to camp, so we stayed there overnight. Unfortunately, this year a new bridge is under construction, and half the camping area is occupied by earth-moving machines making lots of noise. Despite this, there were over a dozen caravans, tents and motorhomes already camped there, taking all the good spots by the river. We walked along the river for awhile, and it did look very pleasant, with nice swimming holes (and no crocodiles).

Photo: Gregory River at camping area



We checked the pub for dinner, and found they were doing a \$10 all you can eat barbeque, with really great serves of salad, plus fish, steak, hamburger and snags (sausages). I guess having a road-building crew resident in the hotel helped encourage them to put on a big feed.

Lawn Hill National Park and Adel's Grove

Unimpressed with the bridge construction, we declined to stay another day at Gregory River, so we drove the 100 km of dirt road to Lawn Hill National Park. The condition of this road varied from fairly smooth to bone-jarringly rough, so we drove very slowly and took nearly 3 hours to get there. People in smaller vehicles with better suspension were making better time.

Photo: Road to Lawn Hill



We could only visit Lawn Hill as day visitors, as the camping area there was full. We took a few nice walks through forest to the Cascades and to Indarri Falls, but we didn't have the ambition to walk as far as the Upper Gorge or take a canoe through the Middle and Upper Gorges, but everyone said that was the best way to see the area. You can bring your own canoe or hire one there for quite reasonable rates.

Photo: A good way to see Lawn Hill Gorge is by canoe



Photo: Rock formations in Lawn Hill National Park



We stayed overnight about 10 km away, at Adel's Grove, a spacious and nicely laid out camping area in wonderful grounds. Early in the morning, as we boiled the billy, an agile wallaby visited us, looking for a handout (no luck).

This was such a pleasant place, and so few people were there, that we would have stayed another day or two, but we had people to meet at our next stop, so we went on the next day.

Doomadgee

After driving back over that dirt road to Gregory Downs, we continued north on a much better dirt road. When we met the Great Top Road, we turned west. This road is considered 4WD only, and definitely would be in wet weather (if you could get through at all), but despite being fairly rough it was no problem at the time we visited.

When we got to the Doomadgee turnoff, the road became much worse. We reached the town in late afternoon and sought directions to the hospital, where we were greeted by fans Craig and Julia Hilton. We stayed with them for several days, collecting our e-mail, washing clothes, and visiting.

Photo: Craig and Julia Hilton



Doomadgee has a population of around 1500. It is on Aboriginal land, under the control of an Aboriginal council, and we had to apply to them for permission to stay. Sale of alcohol is banned in the town, so we were discreet about our supplies. Smuggling beer into town, and selling it at high prices, is a common practice.

The town was run-down and I found it depressing, but the store had good stocks of fresh food, and Julia and Craig introduced us to some of the resident Aboriginal people who are trying to improve the town. There's little employment available locally, though some of the men work at the Pasminco Century zinc mine near Lawn Hill.

The hospital is well-supplied and well-run, and has some of the videoconferencing gear that is being supplied to all Queensland regional hospitals. Craig uses this equipment to keep his patients (who have been transferred to larger hospitals in other places) in touch with their extended families. This is good for everyone's morale. He also uses it for conferences with specialist doctors, as an aid in diagnosis and treatment.

Burketown

Eventually we headed east to Burketown, where we checked out the pub and had some lunch.

East of Burketown the road gets worse. We went off the road to check out the camping sites at Leichhardt Falls, but the sand and the presence of several caravans (and some large crocodiles sunbathing on a sandbar in the river) didn't inspire a stay. No facilities there, and the crocodiles meant no swimming. The river crossing was exciting as the causeway was very little wider than the truck.

Shortly afterwards we crossed the Alexandria River, on the very rough (rocky) natural riverbed. Then on for many kilometres of rough road, through relatively boring gulf savannah country.

Photo: Cattle on road—just one of many hazards

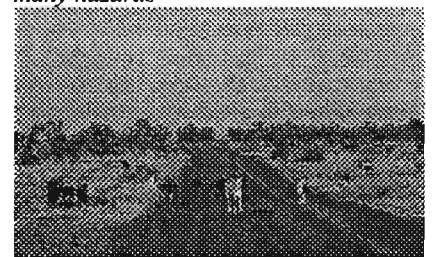


Photo: Warning sign: Please drive to conditions; this is not a highway



Photo: This car didn't make it

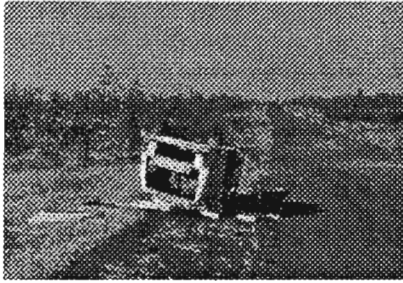
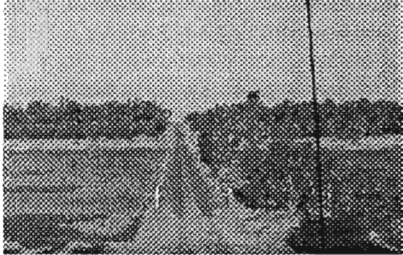


Photo: A typical river crossing



The last 30km before the Normanton turnoff were very corrugated, so we were certainly happy to get back on the bitumen a few km south of Normanton (this is the direct route from the Burke and Wills roadhouse).

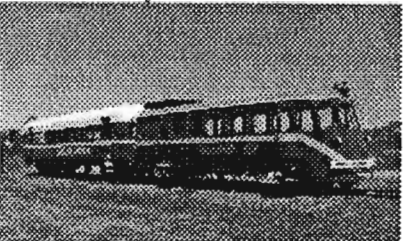
Normanton

When we pulled up at the caravan park, we discovered that we had a broken stainless steel water tank, presumably caused by being bounced around for many kilometres. Fortunately we had two tanks and could close the connection between them. Also fortunately we were not heading into country where we needed a lot of water onboard.

For dinner, we decided the very visible Purple Pub wasn't us, but we had been advised to try the Central Hotel. The food was delicious and plentiful. We had barramundi, our favorite fish, as we were in the heart of barra country.

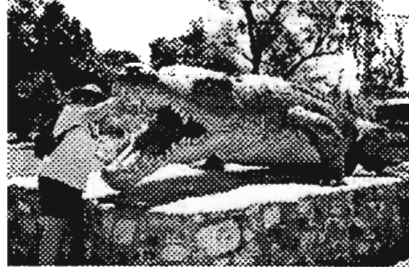
One of Normanton's major attractions is the Gulflander train trip. We didn't want to take the full trip to Croydon (about 94 miles), stay overnight, and ride back, although it sounded very interesting (they deliver the mail to stations along the way), so we were pleased that the next day's trip was a short one, just 16 miles each way. We enjoyed the trip thoroughly, although it was quite bumpy.

Photo: The Gulflander train



One attraction in town in Krys, a full size model of a 28-foot 4-inch salt-water crocodile with a girth of 13 feet. The real croc had been shot by crocodile hunter Krystina Pawloski in the Norman River in July 1958.

Photo: Jean and Krys the crocodile



Karumba

From Normanton, we traveled the good bitumen road 70 km to Karumba Point, on the sea overlooking the Gulf of Carpentaria. This is the centre of the prawning industry, and nearby is the shipping terminal for the zinc from the Pasmenco Century mine. The big tourist attraction is fishing, and there are several charter boats available.

The caravan parks were crowded and looked difficult to get our truck into, so we booked into a motel unit across the street from the Sunset Tavern for two days.

Sunset Tavern, on the point, was the place for the evening. The sea coast is such that you look west and can watch the sun set in a blaze of red across the Gulf of Carpentaria. This was helped by yet another barramundi dinner, and a bottle of wine.

Photo: Sunset Tavern at Karumba Point. The sign on the roof (facing the sea) says "Ice Cold Beer"

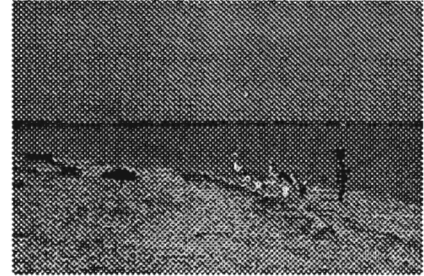


Photo: Sunset as seen from the tavern, with pelicans in the foreground



Karumba Point is a pleasant spot. A walk along the shore just after dawn revealed dozens of people comfortably set up for a morning's (or a day's) fishing. The local pelicans kept an eye on them and came along at sunset to inspect the crab traps as they were emptied.

Photo: Fishing at Karumba Point



Croydon and Georgetown

From Karumba we returned to Normanton, then drove to Croydon and on to Georgetown. The map showed some dirt on this stretch, but the road is now paved all the way.

Founded around 1886, Croydon is now a small historical village of less than 400 people, with several mining museums. Little remains of the large gold mining city it was over a century ago, when the population peaked at 8,000 and there were 26 pubs. It is the eastern terminal of the Gulflander train from Normanton.

In Georgetown, we stayed at the Midway Caravan Park. Their little shop sold an amazing variety of goods and services, being a service station, very decent cafe, lottery agent, video shop, pharmacy and photolab – and they had accommodation and a swimming pool.

Georgetown had also been a gold town, and with a fossicking permit you can still search for nuggets; now and then someone finds one. However, the town didn't seem to offer much else (though there was internet access at the public library).

Mt Surprise

Another 100 km of narrow road brought us to Mt Surprise, one of the stations for the Savannahlander train (a different one from the Gulflander, but another that's a tourist train rather than a way to get from one place to another). Other than the train stations, there were two service stations and a few small museums, which appeared to be closed.

Undara

We reached Undara, famous for its lava tubes, just after lunch time, after only 15 km of corrugated dirt road off the main road.

The main crater of this system of over 160 craters was formed 190,000 years ago. The lava flowed through the mostly flat terrain and along old river beds. The surface solidified while lava continued to flow. The flow was such that many of the tubes emptied themselves of lava when the flow ended, leaving huge hollowed-out lava tubes. The longest tube was 160 km long.

We dined at the Undara Lava Lodge. Much of the lodge, including the accommodation units, the restaurant and bar, is constructed of renovated railway carriages. Permanent tents are also available, as well as space for caravans, motorhomes, and tent camping. At the time we visited (early September), the campground was almost empty. We're not sure why everyone gave up earlier than usual in the season, because the weather was quite pleasant.

Photo: Outdoor dining area, constructed as a train station with platforms



Photo: Our motorhome in the Undara campground



Thomas Atkinson, grandson of the geologist who wrote up some of the details of the tubes, took us on both the morning and afternoon tours and told us a lot about the history and geology of the area. We were the only people on the afternoon tour. In addition to the lava tubes, we saw lots of wallaroos, some emus, cave cockroaches and bats. Some of the mineral patterns on the walls and ceilings of the tubes are really striking.

We took an extra rest day at Undara, which was such a pleasant place that we considered staying longer. However, we were now within two days' drive from home, and I in particular wanted to get there, so we went on.

Photo: Countryside around Undara, with remnant of a volcano in distance

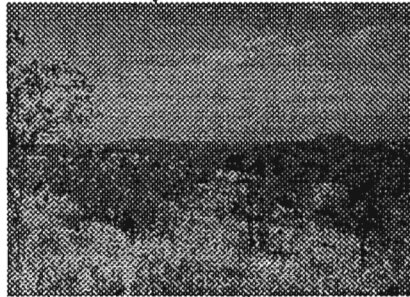


Photo: Inside a portion of a lava tube

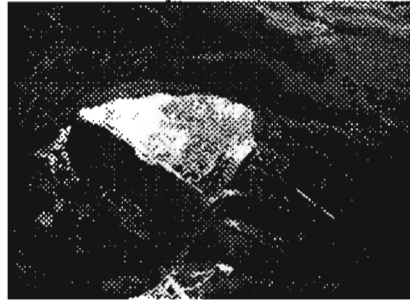


Photo: Eric and Jean in a lava tube



Charters Towers

The mostly empty road to Charters Towers is another one-paved-lane job. After passing Lynd Junction, we came upon the former mining town of Greenvale. The Three Rivers Hotel had a great collection of hubcap clocks on the walls. They were trying to make up a museum for crossword puzzles, and had some really great ones on display.

On to Bluewater Springs for another cooling drink. After a long day's drive (at 70 kph, distances seem rather longer than in the car), we finally reached Charters Towers. For the first time since Longreach, our mobile phones could pick up a signal. We were now officially back in civilisation!

We did no sightseeing in Charters Towers this trip, but drove on the next day, bypassing Townsville (which we visit often) and getting home by early afternoon.

Some general observations

The roads were mostly better than we expected, although a few were in very rough condition. Except for parts of the Gulf Savannah country, we could have done the whole trip in a conventional (non-4WD) vehicle. The road from Cloncurry to Normanton is paved all the way (though only one lane), so we could have had a good taste even of the Gulf country.

More places than we expected had hotel or motel rooms, although many of those were of the shared-facilities variety, and could easily be taken, especially if a tour group came through. But we could bring a tent to use if needed, and stay in motel rooms most of the time if we wanted to.

Public pay phones are readily available, but few accommodation units have phones in the rooms. Internet access is commonly available, though often at restricted times, but finding some place to connect one's own computer to the phone lines is generally not easy. Mobile (cellular) phone access is almost non-existent away from major towns.

Food was plentiful and mostly good to great in the pubs and roadhouses along the way. We only cooked dinner once the whole trip, preferring to let someone else do the work.

In all, the trip we took was considerably less rugged than it would have been 20 years ago, though parts of it would still be difficult if not impossible in wet weather. Of course, there were many places we could have gone off the main roads, where we would have needed the 4WD, but we didn't have good enough maps or the necessary experience in off-road driving, so we didn't go to those places. Perhaps another year?

We had nearly perfect weather for the trip, but we can't count on that. It wasn't too hot, or too cold, or too humid; very little rain fell (a problem for the farmers, but nice for us); and no windstorms occurred. However, we did drive too far in the 4-1/2 weeks, and we didn't spend enough time just being lazy and enjoying the experience.

We also didn't do enough bush camping, preferring to have electricity and the use of someone else's shower and toilet.

Our motorhome is self-contained, but it's a bit cramped. The solar power system and batteries would give us enough power for several days' use, even with my computer on for several hours a day, but we didn't push it.

Letters

Gay Haldeman
haldeman@mit.edu
31 May 2000

A quick "e-mail of comment" on *WeberWoman's Wrevenge*, February 2000.

I really enjoyed your description of your travels and especially, of course, our visit. It brought back lots of good memories; we had a terrific time with you and Eric and are thrilled that we'll have a chance to come back in 2002.

I'm surprised at how I always seem to agree with your book reviews of the books I've also read. T'other day I was trying to explain to someone why I adore George Martin's fantasy novels, even though I'm not a big fan of fantasy, and you hit the nail right on the head.

Pamela Boal
Pamela.Boal@tesco.net
16 May 2000

Thanks to the river being higher and faster than ever before at this time of year, our first real trip of year 2000 starts tomorrow.

Bless you for the book reviews, as ever concise and helpful.

At least the delay to the start of our boating year has given me time to sort out my computer problems (I hope). First it was AOL e-mail really made a mess of things and after many hours on the phone decided that it was my modem. It wasn't. Please note my new address.

Then I simply did not have enough hard drive to handle the photo and graphics work I so enjoy. I have upgraded from 1.2 g to 10g. I also wanted to install a voice recognition programme. The blurb said I needed at least 166. I only had 133 so have upped that to 200. I haven't time to tell you the alarms and excursions that took and the plainly careless attitude of the technician, which caused several trips back to the store. Fortunately I was able to sort out some of the omissions in the service myself. Simply a matter of uninstalling and reinstalling some programmes.

Chester Cuthbert surely has the wrong idea? You are not giving up your home in Airlie Beach, are you? Just like Derek and myself leaving it to visit pastures new, then returning. Chester should know that a surprising amount of equipment can be fitted in to a well organised small space and a surprising amount of possessions are simply not needed.

{You're right. We're certainly keeping our home in Airlie Beach. We've discussed renting it out while we're travelling in the motorhome, but the effort involved in moving all our stuff to storage is too much to contemplate.—JW}

Teddy Harvia
tharvia@airmail.net



Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Rd.
Etobicoke, ON
Canada M9C 2B2
June 20, 2000

So many visitors...we don't get as many as you do, and we're in Toronto! But then, we don't get to travel as much.

{Just wait until Toronto in 2003. That will bring the hordes of visitors to you, as Aussiecon brought them to us.—JW}

We're still working on our CUFF trip report, but unfortunately, Joe Mayhew, whom we'd tapped to illustrate the trip report, passed away a few weeks ago... we were looking forward to seeing Joe again in Chicago, and now, the con will be quieter and much less than it could have been.

I admit I have read little of Connie Willis' books...which ones would you recommend? My own tastes run more to SF than fantasy, and a funny SF book is a rare and wonderful thing. Connie will be the ProGoH at Ad Astra next February, and I'd like to be ready to talk to her about her work.

{Try Doomsday Book, Bellwether, Uncharted Territory, or To Say Nothing of the Dog, none of which are fantasy. Bellwether is the funniest, but Dog comes close.—JW}

Lyn's trip...I've done a little television and radio work for SF myself, and it is a lot of fun. I wish I'd been able to pursue a career in television. Canada has an SF specialty channel, and I'd love to work there, but can't get in. A skritch behind the ears for Tiger, Lyn...it's a rare cat that would miss his owner so much.

Our own travel adventures lately ... this past Memorial Day, Yvonne and I were FanGoHs at VCon 25, the annual convention in Vancouver, British Columbia. We travelled with Rob Sawyer and his wife Carolyn Clink, and we were feted like king and queen once we got there. Dinner at the best Italian restaurant in Vancouver, a great hotel to stay at, a great city to go explore, which we did, and an entertaining convention with Spider Robinson jamming Beatles songs. Great fun all around.

Our departure was the only problem...got there on time, but the airport was understaffed, meaning about 75 minutes worth of waiting in line to check in, and then pay an airport departure tax, and then a line up at the gate... Toronto's airport is partially under construction to build a new terminal and tear down two old ones, but at least, it works. I used to live in BC, and this trip back reminded me why I liked it so much.

July 5, 2000

Most areas of Canada don't have a wet or dry season, but it tends to vary from one to the other in the prairie areas. Sometimes, it's very dry, and the crops are spoiled, and sometimes, there's flood, and the crops are washed away. Just a couple of days ago, one area of

Saskatchewan received a year and a half's rain in a ten-hour period, close to 330 mm. Not only are the crops ruined here, but the roads are covered, and one town has been evacuated because of the flooding.

At last, I can comment on some of the books you list. Every October in several Canadian cities, a main street is blocked on which to set up tables and booths to show off the best of Canadian publishing. It's called Word on the Street, and we enjoy it every year, usually running into friends like Rob Sawyer, who often takes a table on behalf of SFWA.

A few years ago, I won a copy of the Kevin Anderson book by taking a quiz on Canadian literature, and knowing where humorist Stephen Leacock lived... Orillia, Ontario, which is where I grew up, so I had an advantage. The book was an entertaining read, with lots of different takes on Mars and Martian invasions. It's now available in paperback, and it's been popular. This was also Kevin Anderson's effort to become mainstream, after having his name attached to several Star Wars novelizations in the past.

I also read Spider Robinson's *Lifeshouse*. Friends in Rochester, New York came up to us at a con and said, "We found a book with you two in it! You gotta read it! It's called *Lifeshouse* by Spider Robinson!" We were skeptical, but we picked up a copy and enjoyed it. We did see some aspects of the two main characters that reminded us of things we'd do, though... We got a chance to ask Spider directly about the two characters in *Lifeshouse* in Vancouver in May. He said the characters were based on various fannish couples he knows in Canada and the US, so Yvonne and I were certainly among them.

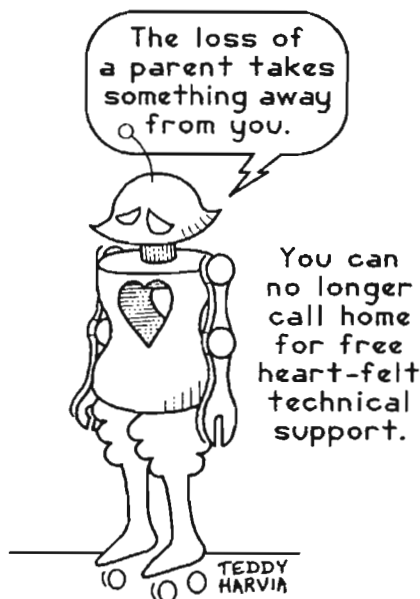
If Lyn's pigfood was so good, someone's going to ask for the recipe at some point. How about a farm cookbook, Lyn? If the fiction doesn't pick up, the non-fiction might.

David Evans is finding some sizable culture shock in the US. At least he's doing what most sensible people do, take it in stride and file

the experiences away for future reference. It's a refreshing change from seeing what some others do... complain about the differences loudly and make fun of them later.

I have to agree with Teddy Harvia. The fanzines that arrive in an envelope seem to have the most value, in terms of being collectible, and in terms of being a gift distributed to contributors and subscribers. However, as someone who is mostly concerned with the contents of a zine, I will still receive e-zines, notifications for webzines, and .pdf files.

Teddy Harvia
tharvia@airmail.net



{The cartoon above was in response to an e-mailed announcement of my father's death in June this year, and my subsequent unplanned trip to the USA. See general diary notes elsewhere in this zine.—Jean}

I also heard from

Lots of people who sent me printed zines, e-zines and news.

Changing the subject completely

Following a discussion (on one of my professional lists) about pre-employment testing, which started off focused on writing tests and then mutated when someone raved on (again) about drug testing, someone posted the following Official Combined Drug-Writing Test.

Official Combined Drug-Writing Test

Answer all questions fully. Be sure to wash your hands after taking this test.

Multiple Choice:

What is wrong with the following sentences?

- After work, Robert walk along the street looking to score a hit.
 - Subject and verb do not agree
 - Use of slang / non-standard English
 - It is safest to buy from a known dealer
 - Robert should buy his "stuff" at lunch
- My boss said that I am out sick too often.
 - Incorrect spelling
 - Incorrect boss
 - Incorrect job
 - Dude, it's just twice a week!
- She bought zip, snort, and weed, and it came in a bag.
 - Unclear pronoun reference
 - Incorrect punctuation
 - Zip comes in sheets, you moron!
 - You should never mix drugs
- Look closely at your monitor. What is your best guess as to your monitor's resolution
 - 640x480
 - 800x600
 - 1024x768
 - Whoa, dude!! My monitor, it's like... it's breathing!

Essay Section:

Write a multi-step procedure for snorting cocaine. Assume your audience is novice drug users. Be sure to include supporting graphics where appropriate.

Choose any recreational drug, and explain how it could effect your work. Would this substance increase or decrease your productivity? Why?

Books

Notes by Jean Weber



John Barnes, *Earth Made of Glass*, 1998, ISBN 0812551613

Sequel to *A Million Open Doors*.

A study of the clash of unbending cultures, each striving to preserve its purity, and convinced of its superiority (all others are barbarians).

Giraut and Margaret are professional diplomats, set to the planet Briand to try to negotiate between the Maya and the Tamils. Their own relationship is rocky; he is oblivious, then knows he's in the wrong but has no idea why.

The springer, an instantaneous matter transmitter, has opened previously isolated planets to people from other cultures and planets, and many cultures are reeling from the shock, not just of cultural differences, but of open trade. The issues are quite relevant to much that's happening on earth today, between the proponents and opponents of free trade.

An interesting book, though I found the breast-beating tedious.

Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Shadow Matrix*, 1997, ISBN 0886778023, and *Traitor's Sun*, 1998, ISBN 0886778115, *Daw*

Two Darkover novels, set in the present, sequels to *Exile's Song*. Margaret (Marguerida) Alton, who has spent most of her life off-planet, and Mikhail Lanart-Hastur feature in these books. She is trying to learn to control her *laran*. He is trying to be a competent Regent for the mad members of the Elhalyn family. In *The Shadow Matrix*, something calls

Margaret and Mikhail to the past, where they play an important role in the history of the planet.

Traitor's Sun continues the story, as the Terrans finally close their base on Darkover. The stage is set for more books, but with the author's death the series is probably finished. As a wrap-up, this was pretty good.

Darkover fans should like these books, and those who haven't discovered the series will probably find them interesting and enjoyable too, and perhaps be inspired to seek out earlier books in the series.

C.J. Cherryh, *Fortress in the Eye of Time*, 1995, ISBN 0061056898, *Fortress of Eagles*, 1998, ISBN 006105710X, *Fortress of Owls*, 1999, ISBN 0061020087, *Harper*

I haven't read any of Cherryh's fantasy in several years, but decided to give this series a try. I'm glad I did, because I enjoyed them.

Tristen is Shaped by Mauryl the wizard to continue an ancient war against Hasufin, an evil wizard who refuses to die. At first an ignorant and innocent young man, Tristen discovers that when he needs to know a piece of information, it pops into his mind as if he had known it all along. This is both a blessing and a curse, as it makes people quite suspicious of him.

As the stories develop, Tristen becomes more involved in local politics, though he would rather not be. The complexities of the politics are typical of Cherryh's well plotted writing. Another books is out.

Mary Gentle, *A Secret History*, 1999, ISBN 0380788691, and *Carthage Ascendant*, 2000, ISBN 0380805502 (Volumes 1 and 2 of *The Book of Ash*), *Avon*

Ash grew up in a mercenary soldiers' camp and became a leader of mercenaries, despite being female. She hears a voice that gives her tactics in battlefield situations, but knows not to mention this to others.

Her successes bring her to the attention of royalty, who marry her off to a nobleman, hoping to thus curb her unwomanly activities. The tactic doesn't work, especially when

the Visigoths seem about to conquer all of Europe.

Ash meets the Visigoths' general, a woman who could be Ash's twin sister (and who hears the same voice). Eventually Ash is captured and taken to the Visigoths' capital of Carthage, from which she must escape and try to free Europe from their murderous rule.

As the books progress, Gentle drops small, then larger, hints that the world in which these events take place isn't quite the same world that inhabits our history.

Lisa Mason, *Imperium Without End*, 1999, ISBN 0553575716, and *Imperium Afire*, 2000, ISBN 055358166X (Books I and II of *Pangaea*), *Bantam*

A rather heavy-handed look at a society bound by caste, religion, and custom. Although the story was interesting, I found the constant repetition of certain points tedious, and the whole premise a bit hard to accept.

Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *Scholastic*, 1997, ISBN 059035342X

After listening to numerous friends tell me I "must" read the Harry Potter books, I broke down and bought this one (the first in the series) on sale. I'm glad I did; I quite enjoyed it. Although the story is nothing special, I thought it nicely captured that feeling of being in the wrong family, not understood by one's parents, picked on and punished for things one didn't do, and finding a talent that allows one to get even. I'll read the other books too.

Harry Turtledove, *Colonization: Second Contact*, *Del Rey*, 1999, ISBN 0345430220

Another volume in the saga of the invasion of Earth by The Race (aka Lizards). Now the colonization fleet has arrived, to find that the invasion fleet failed to subdue the planet.

Turtledove deftly mixes history, speculation, social comment, and humor. I've enjoyed this series immensely.

Diary notes

by Jean Weber

In November 1999 I got word that my father had a terminal illness, pulmonary fibrosis. I visited my parents in February-March on the trip to Corflath. I had hoped to see my father at least once more, but I hadn't realized (until too late) just how quickly his health was deteriorating.

When Eric and I were planning our motorhome trip, we were particularly concerned about the problems of keeping in touch with my parents, because we knew we'd be out of mobile (cellular) phone contact for most of the trip. Fortunately, one thing after another kept delaying our departure from early June to later in June.

On Monday, 19 June (Sunday, Father's Day, in the USA), I phoned my parents. Mother said Dad wasn't going to last until my next planned visit (in November), so I started making arrangements to go earlier.

On Tuesday morning, Eric took his driving test (to get his license to drive the motorhome) and we planned to leave on Wednesday. On Tuesday afternoon, my mother phoned to say that my father had just died. What a shock! Even more of a shock for my sister, who had arrived late Sunday for a week's visit with them. She'd spent most of Monday talking finances with my father (my sister is the family tax accountant).

I promptly booked a flight to Seattle for the following week. The trip was not without its drama, starting with expediting the renewal of my Australia passport (which I'm writing about elsewhere). Then, I arrived in Sydney to discover that my flight to the USA had been cancelled (the plane was still on the ground in San Francisco) and that all the SFO passengers were being put onto a flight to LA later in the day, and my connection to Seattle had to be changed. Then the flight out of LA was delayed.... Oh, well, eventually I got to Mother's, and as I

was flying Business Class, I got treated very well by United.

The following week I flew to Washington DC with Mother. We stayed in the Sheraton National, a hotel on the Virginia side of the river (and one in which several conventions had been held, some years ago). My sister's room had a great view out towards the Mall; we could see the Capitol dome and several of the major monuments, as well as the national Fourth of July fireworks show! The funeral was on the 5th, and we were all astonished at the beautiful weather. Having lived in the DC area for many years, we all knew that July can be ghastly: hot, humid, smoggy. The 4th was a bit that way, but the 5th was very pleasant—not too hot, not too humid, and relatively clean air.

Afterwards, I stayed at Mother's for four weeks, to keep her company and help sort out some things. We haven't had just-the-two-of-us time since 1967, the year my father was in Vietnam and my sister had gone off to university.

The funeral certainly was an impressive ceremony. There were 2 platoons of honor guard, a full brass band, a horse-drawn carriage carrying the coffin, a riderless horse with the boots turned backwards, 7 riflemen each firing 3 rounds (for a 21-gun salute), and the graveside ceremony involving the folding of the flag.

I'm not a fan of the military, but I'm glad my father got the recognition he deserved, after a 32-year Army career including service in three wars (WWII, Korea, and Vietnam).

Dad graduated from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1938. He joined the Army in 1940 and served in Burma and India. He was a founding member of the Military Police Corps and was Provost Marshal of several military bases, including the Southern European Task Force, Verona, Italy,

1959-60, where he was responsible for the physical security of US Army nuclear missiles in northern Italy. (That one I didn't know until I read his obituary.) As a senior colonel, he was deputy commander of the 18th Military Police Brigade in Vietnam, 1967-68.

Later he was a faculty member of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (now National Defense University), specializing in international economics and area studies of the Middle East and South Asia.

Dad married my mother in August 1940. After he retired from the military in February 1972, they spent the next 27 years travelling, sailing large power boats, and doing all sorts of interesting things.

Being a meticulous, organized, and realistic person who planned ahead in detail, Dad had arranged and paid for his and Mother's funerals years ago, so she didn't have to do much except phone the right people.

Because death isn't a taboo subject in our family, and because Dad was concerned about Mother's welfare (both financially and emotionally) after his death, we could all discuss her plans, even in his presence.

I thought that was a particularly healthy attitude, but I've noticed that some people look at me oddly when I say that—as if they think she was looking forward to his demise. Not at all—but once someone's dying, and in considerable discomfort, then death is a blessing and the bereaved need to get on with their lives. Grieve, of course, at losing a loved one, but be comforted by the fact that they are no longer suffering.

I've put on my website a copy of a zine containing photos of the funeral. If you're interested, the address is <http://www.wrevenge.com.au/wrevenge/funeral.pdf>

Farming Daze - notes from rural New Zealand

by Lyn McConchie

Noel Coward {a young steer} bit the dust in early May. He'd been becoming steadily more aggressive for a long time. He was just on 16 months old, a time when many bulls get nasty, but Noel hadn't waited. He'd been like that since he was less than a year old and by the time he was ten months I'd issued an order. No one was to go into his paddock alone. If they went, they were to have someone standing by to call for help. Most of us dared it at some stage, Dean and Dianne after mushrooms, me checking the water trough, but no one alone.

Now Noel was getting worse. We had managed to get next door's cow out of his field but even Alan from the dairy farm where she belonged had noticed Noel's behaviour and said we should get rid of him. A steer who thinks he's a bull is often more dangerous than a straight-out young bull. I agreed. So I called Steve, who does our pig and cattle killing and who lives up the road about twenty minutes away in Takapau. He said he'd be there on Monday.

So Sunday night I went out to move Noel to the paddock we use at such times. Hummmm, if I leaned over the fence, undid the gates and pushed them open, he should wander down overnight to the far end because all three of the heifer yearlings were right by the gate down there. I did and Noel did. I checked in the early morning and there he was.

Now, if I could just sneak quietly into the paddock, I could open the gate. I called Bet {a cow}, who came readily. With her by the fence I drifted across the lambing paddock, opened the gate and scuttled back through to her. It wasn't any distance, but I can't run in an emergency and Noel certainly could. Phew. Safely back behind the other gate, I waited. Noel saw this gate too was open and entered the lambing paddock. I encouraged Bet first to meet him over the fence then to lead him away down it. Once they were a good distance away, I slunk in and shut the top gate.



Noel was in the paddock where he was required. And about an hour later Steve rolled up. I shot out hastily to warn him. He's used to my stock being so quiet he can just walk into the paddock and up to them. Not with Noel if he valued his health. But Steve's experienced and Noel wasn't the first dangerous animal he'd dealt with over the years. He opened the gate quietly, slid into the field and advanced. I stayed by the gate. Noel saw an intruder and roared. Then he dug his horns into the ground, flung earth about, roared louder and advanced slowly.

Just as he was deciding to charge, Easter mooed at him from the nearby field. He turned to reassure her he could deal with this small stupid intruder (he'd grind him into paste in a minute) and, presented with the perfect shot, Steve took it. Noel folded quietly to the ground and became a source of many steaks, roasts, and slabs of corned beef for Winter.

The tail end of May was busy. Between printing out my new book in hard copy and making a copy disk I was being driven completely mad by calves and lambs. Ginger next door had asked me to have my three heifer yearlings home again. Grass growth was slowing and she wanted all her

paddocks to grow on well before Winter. I opened gates, waved at the calves who all ignored me. I moved on to throwing things and they noticed fast. The all tore down the paddock right to the end, and bunched there. Sigh. I'd wanted them at the other end. That took a while as we all circled the paddock three times before it dawned on them the gate was open.

That meant it was time to electric fence the big hay paddock. I'd had it fenced off on one wire just to keep Bet out. But one wire at some 33 inches high wouldn't even slow the sheep down and with the wire at the top Holly at least was small enough to sag to the knees and walk under. So Dianne went out and put in three wires. Unfortunately she put them at the three upper levels. The sheep were let in, marched the length of the field, put their noses down, lifted the lower wire and kept marching. Straight into the front third of the field where I *didn't* want them to be.

Dianne rocketed out of their house truck screaming and waving her arms. The sheep all shot back through the fence again, leaving the lower wire in sagging loops. So back we went and shifted all three wires down to the lowest three levels, tightened them hard, and just hoped the next instalment wasn't the yearlings jumping over the top wire which was now only 27 or so inches above the ground. I watched around a corner as the lambs drifted up to the fence. Hannibal, Cherry's lamb, stuck his nose under. Drat. The electric tape wouldn't lift high enough. He tried several times. I did some drifting of my own, out to the shed to lay hands on an electric fence mobile unit. I had the batteries in a drawer. With that loaded I went out and hooked it in to the wires, the lower one in particular. That gave me an electrified fence. Hannibal came to see what I'd been up to, pushed the wire up with his nose, and rose into the air with a lamb screech. *Yowch!* Now everyone is staying away from the fence and grazing where I want them.

The ACC (my pension people) demanded I attend a Rehabilitation Orthopaedic specialist over in Palmerston North, giving me under a week to make arrangements.

I rang up and explained in words of one syllable why I couldn't do it. If I take the bus it means walking a kilometre and waiting 15 minutes by the side of the main highway. I can't take the electric scooter as that would mean leaving it there and probably having it stolen. If it's even a light drizzle over the walk/wait, I end up soaked. Then I'm in wet clothing all day. Last time I did that I was flat in bed for more than a week afterwards. Besides which the only morning bus doesn't leave Norsewood until 10.45, to arrive in Palmerston around 12. I'd been given an 11 o'clock appointment. Even if it was shifted to a manageable time, it would mean going over and back by bus, which in turn meant having to stay a night.

The rehab officer queried why. There were afternoon buses going back. Yes, there were. But I get bus-sick. Take a bus back only a couple of hours after getting off one and I'd be throwing up continually from about halfway home. So, I wasn't coming. If they wanted me they could give decent notice so Ginger could drive me over.

At which point I became puzzled. They can't rehabilitate me in the sense of getting me back to employment. Or did they, I asked, have delusions that after seeing this specialist I could hop merrily back into the employment market and not only persuade an employer to hire me, but also manage to keep the job? Er, well. No. No indeed. They thought he could help with "pain management." A lot became suddenly clear.

It's about five years since I last saw a specialist. Under their own rules they have to have another appointment for me plus the specialist's comments on paper. All this was about getting their forms filled out. So I bargained. I'd see the orthopaedic chap who comes over to our hospital in Dannevirke once a month. I'd get him to send them a report. And I'd have my GP send them a request for pain management so I could see the

chap who does that in Dannevirke. Two different people but the same final result. Would that do?

They happily agreed it would and the rehab officer then became confidential. They thought I was doing wonderfully with my writing. They had no wish to push me back to some office and accepted it wasn't possible. But they had to keep the right forms being added to my file. I shouldn't worry. I refrained from telling her that everyone who has anything at all to do with the ACC as a "client" tends to worry a lot. Every time one of their envelopes appears, it's usually bad news delivered in the most unpleasant way possible with little warning. Then they wonder why their clients' reactions to them tend to be consistently negative. Someone should sit them down one day and explain. But it isn't going to be me. I have enough to do with uncooperative lambs. A whole government Dept. is more than I want to handle.

September was a busy month. It began with a fine spell in which temperatures, possibly celebrating the official beginning of Spring, rose up and warmed everything. So I stopped using the fire. Wood remained out in the wood shed and I enjoyed not hauling stacks of it inside each day.

Unfortunately something else also enjoyed that in an indirect sort of way. Starlings! With no smoke rising from the flue, a couple of young ones felt that my flue-top might make a suitable nest site. And of course as always happens, they fell down the flue. I knew they had, but sometimes they manage to scabble their way back up and out again. Not this pair. They scabbled in there for a couple of days... while the weather turned cold again and I wanted to relight the fire. Being an animal lover and having an all too vivid imagination, I couldn't do that. But I couldn't persuade the idiots to get out either even by banging on the flue and yelling.

So I howled for Dean, who climbed onto the roof, removed the flue cap and yelled down the flue. The starlings promptly fell all the way to the bottom in fright. You can remove the top of the fire by tilting a plate within and lifting it out. That I pre-

sume is for the benefit of the chimney sweep. But in this case it should benefit idiot starlings as well. Dean tramped inside, removed the plate and groped within. An expression of triumph spread over his face and he withdrew his hand clutching a screaming young starling. That, when tossed out the door, was last seen streaking for the hills as if the devil was behind him.

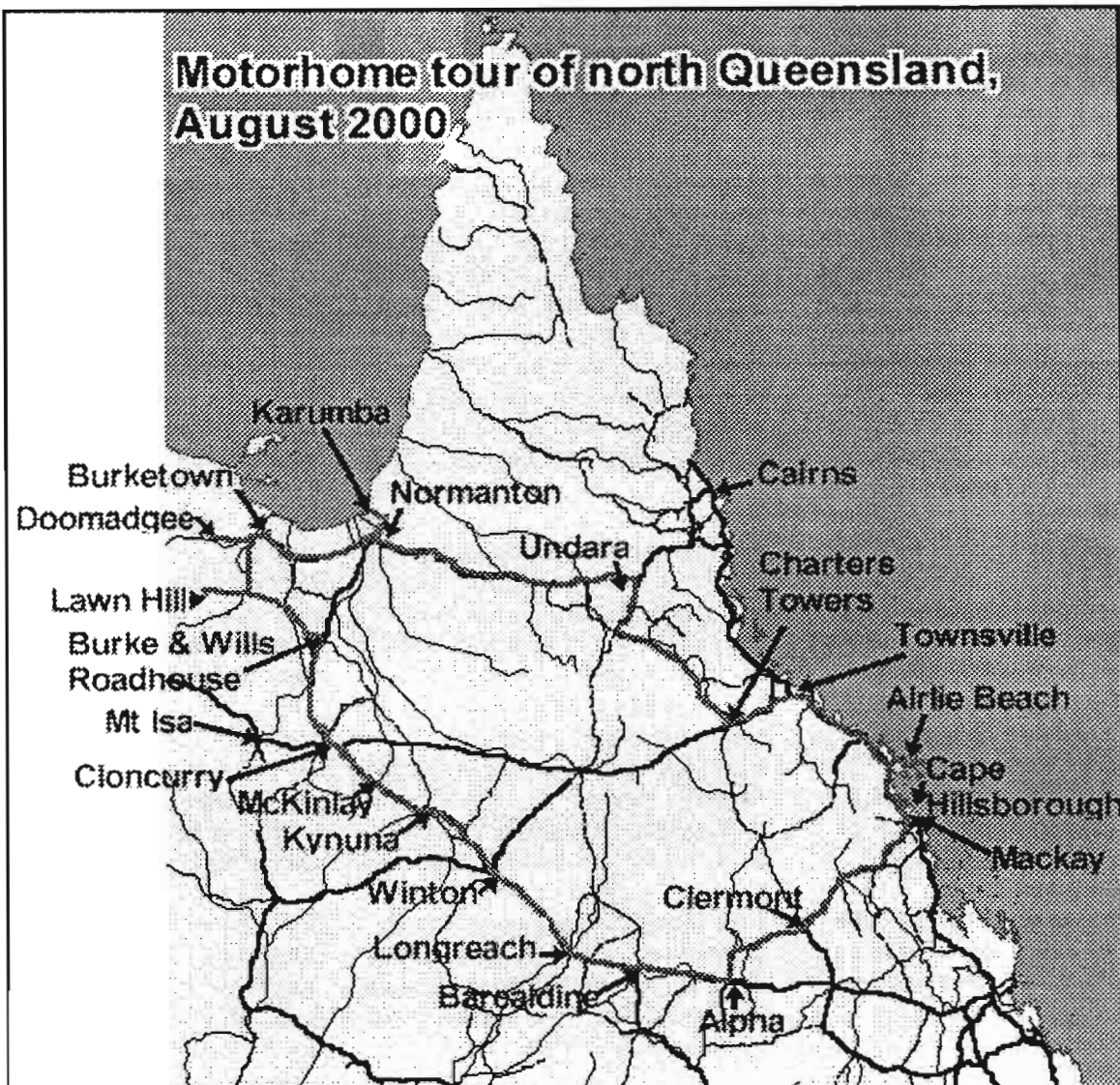
Dean went to leave and from the fireplace came further scabbling. He sighed and went back to open the door on the fireplace. *This* starling didn't wait to be caught. He rocketed out of the fireplace door, hurtled the length of the house and vanished into the bathroom with Dean in hot pursuit. Tiger, who'd suddenly woken up to the possibilities, was right behind him. And me, wailing not to let Tiger catch the bird, bringing up in the rear. Dean snatched the starling out of the air a second before Tiger did and evicted that bird too.

But, because by the time I'd been able to lay hands on Dean to help and we'd successfully removed both birds, it was now four o'clock, evening chore time. The cows were suggesting hay, the hens were mentioning henfood, and if I did plan to light the fire I'd better haul firewood first. Once all that was done, hampered also by a phone call, it was after five in the evening and not that cold. I'd leave lighting the fire again until morning.

I woke early, around 6. Now, I thought, would be a good time to light the fire. I could get it going, go back to bed and read an hour while the house warmed, then get up and start work. At this hour, the flue should be clear of birds intent on nesting. I was quite wrong.

I opened the fire door to begin putting in wood and a sooty and hysterical starling came past me. Tiger woke up. I fell backwards off the very low stool I use to sit on to stoke the fire, and Tiger vaulted over my prostrate form, Dancer appeared from the woodwork and joined in. While I struggled to get to my feet again, the whole circus passed me clockwise several times. I reeled up in the end and cornered everyone in

Motorhome tour of north Queensland, August 2000



Lyn McConchie, continued

the bathroom. With the cats grabbed and shut out, the starling panting up by the roof, I opened the bathroom window and shoo'd.

Birdbrain finally got the idea and shot through the opening. I shut the window again, heaved a sigh and went to explain to the cats. However, they now have the idea the flue is a starling trap and should be watched closely. It's too bad they're right.

Why starlings have decided this year to fall down it in increasing numbers, I have no idea. But I've quickly evolved a strategy: I hear the initial scrabbling, shut the cats in my bedroom, then open all the outside doors before opening the fireplace and taking out the top plate

if necessary. A bird goes by at high velocity, finds a door and departs. I put things back together and release the cats again.

It's annoying me and annoying the cats; what the starlings think about it all, none are pausing to discuss. Just so long as they stay out while the fire is going I don't mind that much. So far it always happens the morning after the fire has been left to go out the previous night, so the fire is cold. But it is something of a nuisance. I can't wire-netting the flue top as it blocks up too quickly. And as I write, we've had another warm spell, I let the fire go out again and something is scrabbling in the flue once more. I'll be back shutting out cats and opening doors when I've finished this.

Stop Press!

Eric and I have won GUFF, the Get Up-and-over Fan Fund.

We'll be attending EasterCon in the UK in April 2001, then traveling around the UK (and possibly continental Europe, if we have the time, energy and money) for a month or more, visiting fans. We plan to return to Australia by way of the USA, including a stop at Wiscon. (GUFF won't be paying for all of this, but it does give us an opportunity to visit as many friends, both old and new, as possible.)

We're open to suggestions on where to go, events to attend, people to visit (and stay with).