

AussieCon I Report done for SFPA 67, September 1975

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Who the devil decided that the deadline should be on Sept 25 rather than the end of the month? I need all the time I can get.... I took a large laundry basket to the P0 to get the mail that was held for me - I should have taken two. There probably won't be an IT COMES IN THE MAIL this time, but with luck I will get my comment-zine in.

Well, let's see.... I flew out of here on August 8 to Chicago by way of DC, changed to a 747 in Chicago, and got into LA as planned on Friday evening. A very dull flight, there were no other fans on the plane. I had booked a room at the Marriott near the airport, so I went on over and ran into a few people, including DUFF nominee Jan Howard Finder, just in from Italy. There was a party in the hotel that evening, well attended by the Group Flight members and some of the local LA fans. The flight organizers, Don and Grace Lundry - later to be known as Father and Mother Hen, also Amazing Grace - started passing out literature, tickets, admonitions, etc. They were very well organized, especially in having the group broken down into smoking & non-smoking for seating and room assignments which I appreciated. Who all was on the flight? I doubt I can remember all 60 names, but let's see - Jack Chalker, Joan Serrano, Stu Tait, Jake Waldman, Jim Landau, Don (Denver) Thompson, Gail Barton (of Slanapa - there were no fellow SFPAnS), John Millard, Mike Glicksohn & Sheryl Birkhead, Cathy Hill, Roy & Deedee Lavender, Fred Prophet, Rusty Hevelin and his adopted son Bob Tucker, Don Bailey, Bruce & Elayne Pelz, Don & Grace Lundry, John Hartmann, Jackie Simpson, John Roy and his wife, Lynn Hickman and his wife, Alan Frisbee, Ed Roepke, Ben Yalow, Jan Finder and others. I never did find out everyone's name.

On Saturday, Aug 9, arrangements had been made for some of the local fans to drive those who were interested out to the LASFS Clubhouse, a nice one-story stucco building on Ventura, a long ways from the airport area. I also got to see the fabulous Bruce Pelz collection. About 6PM, we all got out to the airport again, to be ready for the 9PM Air New Zealand flight to Honolulu, Auckland, and finally (after 20 hours in the air, Sydney. Somewhere in LA I lost the only important thing I would lose on the whole trip, my "Frodo Lives" (in Elvish by John Closson) button. Air New Zealand was quite nice to us, the fans seats were blocked together in the DC-10 and they made no attempt to enforce the 44 pound weight limit that some had worried about - Chalker was carrying both Aussiecon films and samples of all the current Mirage books.

As we took off, Tucker (who had never flown before) declared that it was SMOOOTH.... and did not seem to be bothered with any sort of airsickness, then or later.

We had not been in the air but a few hours when Alan Frisbie borrowed a portable typer from Lewis Elver Grey (how could I forget the ineffable Lewis Grey) and started the first of many oneshots produced during the trip - I am told these will be reprinted as a single volume and sold for DUFF. Don Thompson also had his typer along, and someone had plenty of stencils.

The stopovers in Honolulu and Auckland (NZ) for fuel and fresh crews were only an hour each, and having lost Sunday, Aug 10, altogether in crossing the International Date Line, we got to Sydney on the afternoon of Monday, Aug 11. The group flight included rooms that evening at the Hyatt Kingsgate, and we met many of the Sydney area fans there, including Eric Lindsay (who had ridden from New Orleans to Toronto with me the year of TorCon), Ken Ozanne (not a Lindsay hoax after

all), Robin Johnson, Keith Curtis, Al Fitzpatrick, Ron Graham, Ron & Sue Clarke, Shayne McCormack. There was a party, but I was suffering from the inevitable jet lag, and went to bed early. The next day, Tuesday, a number of people went on various tours in the Sydney area - I went book-hunting with Keith Curtis, though we did meet Fitzpatrick and Bob Tucker and Frank Olnyck in a bar and Tucker offered me a beer. My memory did not function properly the rest of the evening - I am not used to alcohol.

I was supposed to ride to Melbourne with Lindsay and Ozanne in Ozanne's Jaguar, but alas, it was not to be - Lindsay and Ozanne had tried to find out how fast the Jaguar would go, and had thrown a valve. As if that weren't bad enough, Ken and Marea's 6-year-old son Alexander had been run over in his own driveway by a drunken woman with no license in an unregistered car that she didn't own. Fortunately the child was recovering in the hospital from an assortment of broken bones and contusions, but Marea had to miss the convention.

So Ken Ozanne rode to Melbourne (about 700 miles) with a large group of us on the overnight train, the Aurora. Another oneshot was produced on the train, handwritten in the bar by Joannie Serrano and others. Joannie kept the manuscript and I got it run off later in Melbourne. The diner was excellent, and the Bar car (we took over about half of it) was quite nice, tho they threw us out at eleven. The sleeping compartments were fine too, but I got very little sleep, I couldn't get used to the motion and kept waking up. Each compartment had two bunks and its own bath. I shared a compartment with Landau.

One of the first things I did in Melbourne after getting settled in the hotel (I shared a room in all the hotels with Stu Tait, a Canadian fringe-fan) was to wander over to Space-Age Books, the center of Melbourne fandom. This is a good-sized shop (not the one in the film, they have moved) with all the new US and British Sf and related material on the first floor and the Melbourne SF Soc. meeting room and library (three times the size of the LASFS library, at least) and the old pulps on the second floor.

The con itself begins to run together in my mind. The official opening was a bit of a drag due to a local politician who claimed to be a fan and had gotten to be toastmaster. He blathered on until I wished the fans would stand up and shout BULLSHIT! in unison, as in BLAZING SADDLES, but no such luck. Finally he introduced Ursula LeGuin and things improved.

The hotel (the Southern Cross) was very cooperative and gave us no trouble that I know of. Besides the large ballroom where the opening, the banquet, the costume ball, and the films and panels took place, there was a well-lit room for the art show (with tight security - you couldn't even take a camera in), a couple of small huckster rooms (one with a well set up selection from Space Age, the other with Chalker's stuff from Mirage and some Trekkies). Another very large display room consisted entirely of publishers samples. These were all on the mezzanine floor. On the top floor of the hotel was the con suite with its own kitchen and a large balcony-type room. The StarTrek computer games were set up here most of the time - these were cassette-programmed Wangs, I forget the model number, and were very popular.

The Group Flight Tour included a Banquet ticket and there was no Banquet anyway, so I went, and it was much better than I expected. The beef dish was excellent and the potatoes did not bounce. I think some 300-400 of the 600 attendees were there and only a few complained of cold food. Toward the end of the meal there was quite a lot of paper airplane activity. The Hugo awards (and the Opening, for that matter) started with a magnificent slide/music show by a local outfit called Sonigraphics, on a permanent screen that was also used for the movies. This was a Cinemascope-size screen on one wall, stretched into position by ropes at the edges, quite attractive.

The costume ball was small but fun, and I took some movie film with a Kodak Instamatic borrowed from Newport News fan Dave Ortman, using ASA160 film - haven't seen yet how it turned out.

Aside from the usual BEMs and half-naked ladies, there was an elaborate presentation by a local SCA-type group called the Vikings - but they used real weapons. I thought they would kill some of the photographers near the edge of the stage several times, but no one was hurt.

The art show was excellent. I had carried six small paintings by Kelly Freas and turned them over to the local fan in charge. The mounting boards had not arrived on time and they had to improvise but it was quite adequate. Australia has a law similar to Canada's - art valued at over \$50 (Australian - about \$65 US) is 'fine art' and duty free, but lower priced pieces are dutiable. All of the Freas pieces were priced (minimum bid) over \$100 US, so I had no trouble with customs - I declared the stuff but they didn't even ask to see them. Some of the art shipped in from the US was priced as low as \$50 US, and I hear there was some hassle with customs and they had to pay some duty on it. Three of the six Freas pieces sold at the minimum bid (but in Australian dollars!) and I brought the other three and a receipt back for Kelly.

The only films I saw were BARBARELLA (I had only seen it once before) and a strange avant-garde Swedish anti-war film called THE GLADIATORS, which I enjoyed very much at about 2:30-4:00 AM. I had wanted to see SOLARIS, which was shown at a small theater down the street in conjunction with the con, but it was never there when they said it would be and I missed it.

I took a lot of photos during the con, including some I hope to print in b&w - I took most of the portrait-type shots with b&w film in the Instamatic I bought for the trip, using an electronic flash. I even got one of Ron Smith and his young daughter - he was the editor of INSIDE and the Hugo he won for it, one of the old Oldsmobile-hood-ornament models, resides in the window at Space Age Books.

Sometime during the con I got the manuscript of the train oneshot from Joannie Serrano, bought a ream of goldenrod mimeo paper at a store in the shopping complex beneath the hotel, and got Jim Landau (a demon typist) to type it up on stencil. I even traced some art onto stencil by taping it to the window. Then I got the con chairman, Bill Wright to show me how to use his mimeo and ran it off without much trouble - Bill has a lovely little portable Roneo. How many con hotels could you buy mimeo paper in the bottom of - and how many con chairmen would take the time to help run off an asinine oneshot? I made around 150 copies, and 30 of them should be in this SFPA mailing.

Bill Wright ran a very well-organized con, and nothing seemed to bother him. He took three of us out to dinner one night (the last of the con, I think) at a Chinese place, very good. And another fan and I spent the night at his house the last night in Melbourne too, when we no longer had rooms at the Southern Cross. This was the second Chinese dinner I had in Australia. The first, which I neglected to mention, was in Blacktown, a small place outside Sydney where a bunch of us went to an animal sanctuary and Alan Frisbie was bitten by a Wombat - fortunately it did not break the skin. I took some film there too. The wombat looks very much like a giant guinea-pig (about 3 feet long) and most of them were comatose, but one lively one ran over for Frisbie to stick his hand in it's mouth.

In the consite voting at Melbourne, Orlando won easily for '77. I was surprised by the margin NY had over DC. Alan Huff presented an excellent slide show for DC, but it had never been shown before and so had little impact on the vote.

After the con in Melbourne, Jack Chalker and I and Joan Serrano, Stu Tait, and Jake Waldman decided to start our tour of Australia by flying to Hobart, on the far southern side of the island state of Tasmania. Jack and I wanted to meet Don Tuck (who had not been able to get to the con, for reasons that were never made clear) and the rest of them wanted to go to the gambling casino in Hobart. The Hobart airport is rather small - I think we had about 200 feet of runway left when the pilot got the little 737 stopped. We picked up an Avis car (a very nice red Falcon) at the airport, and since there was a lot of daylight left, we drove away from Hobart, down past the Tasman Arch, the

Devil's Kitchen, and the Blowhole to the old prison colony at Port Arthur, now a memorial. After dark, we drove back into Hobart to see Tuck. Fortunately, Tuck lives on the Port Arthur side of the river, as the big high-rise bridge across the Derwent at Hobart had been knocked out by a ship and wouldn't be fixed for a couple of years. When we got into the suburb of Lindisfarne, I called Tuck on the phone. He suggested a local place where we could eat, and said that while it was not convenient for us to visit his home, he would join us later with his wife. So we went to the restaurant - it had just opened up and was very nice - and had a good dinner. Tuck did join us about 8 and we talked until 10 or so. We were the first fans he had seen, Forry Ackerman and a larger group did not arrive until the next night. We were still left with the problem of getting across the river to the Travelodge in Hobart where we had rooms for the night. The nearest unbroken bridge was about 40 miles north. But it turned out the Tuck is PR man and in charge of photography for the big Hobart zinc works, and he got us on the little 8-car cable ferry, which I am told is the only vehicular ferry across the river and is used mostly for priority vehicles. So we got to the hotel and then went over to the casino. I had little interest in it and just watched, but the other four played, mostly blackjack - I don't remember who won and who lost, but it wasn't over \$20 either way. The next morning, we left to drive north across the island.

The island of Tasmania is about 200 miles across the middle from Hobart to Devonport. At the last moment, we decided to take the gravel logging road around the Great Lake in the middle of the island rather than stick to the main road that followed the railroad tracks. These roads are well graded, if a bit steep and narrow in places. This was the first driving we had done in Australia. They drive on the left, with the steering wheel on the right. Chalker had some familiarity with this from having driven in England, but neither Tait nor I had ever done it. The other two in the group did not drive at all (New Yorkers...). Jack finally let Tait drive a bit up in the mountains, but after he ran the car in a ditch to avoid a logging truck, Jack chickened out and didn't let me drive until we were back down on the coast. Anyway, it was a very interesting drive, cool and rather damp, but not unpleasantly so. We went around the Great Lake on the west rather than on the east as we had intended, as we never saw the turnoff. I got some pictures. The forest is mostly eucalyptus, of course, and I am told they use it for lumber, pulp, and telephone poles. Lots of sheep too. We saw little native wild-life - even in the zoos the Tasmanian devils would not come out of their holes. There are parts of Tasmania on the western side of the island that are still unexplored, and the supposedly extinct Tasmanian tiger (act~ally a marsupial wolf, but with tiger-like stripes) ate someone there a couple of years ago. Coming down out of the mountains, we stopped for lunch in Deloraine, and I drove from there to Devonport. I found little trouble with mirror-image driving, tho of course it requires more concentration than what I was used to. Waldman found some curious postage stamps in Deloraine, the price had been changed while they were being printed - I got some later in Melbourne for my aunt, who is a collector.

We learned later that we were not the only ones who did not get to see the Tuck collection - Tuck entertained Ackerman and the others in the restaurant on top of the Hobart Travelodge, and apparently no one got to see his home or collection. A Tasmanian fan at the con, Mike O'Brien, said that the local fans did get together at Tuck's place about once a year, however.

We left the rental car in Devon port, and boarded the overnight ferry to Melbourne, a huge twin-diesel sea-going vehicular ferry called The Empress of Australia. It is about 200 miles across to Melbourne, and we did not arrive until about ten the next morning.

In Melbourne we picked up the luggage we had left at the Southern Cross, and got another Avis rental car, this time a station wagon. It had not been properly serviced, the ashtrays were full, the windshield washers did not work, and the back would not lock. But it ran alright. We visited a large animal sanctuary outside Melbourne, the only place I felt cold enough to put on a heavy sweater I had along - most of the time I wore a long-sleeve shirt and a corduroy jacket and was quite comfortable. Here as in many of the zoos and animal sanctuary type places (we had been to the Melbourne zoo with Bill Wright), the smaller kangaroos (up to about 3 ft high) and the emu birds were allowed to roam free and mingle with the people. They are quite placid, rather like tame deer.

The kangaroos, that is - the emus are a bit bolder, and will eat anything. The large kangaroos were kept penned, as were the ostriches, which are apparently rather vicious. Jack was attacked by a large Cape Barren goose at the Melbourne zoo, but was not harmed. The ostriches we saw stood well over 6 foot, while the emus were less than five foot tall, and otherwise more or less ostrich-shaped.

After touring the animal sanctuary we started up the main road from Melbourne to Sydney, the Hume Highway. Most of it is good two-lane, with passing lanes to get around the trucks on an upgrade - and there were a lot of trucks. Gas ran about 70 cents/imperial gallon, not too bad. There were plenty of motels and eating places, and lots of service stations - everyone of which advertised in large letters that it would replace the windshield of your car. I finally discovered that lost windshields are a very common occurrence to the Australian motorist, mostly because they do not have the law that the US has had for years requiring all cars to have laminated windshields. Even our rented Falcon wagon had a single-thickness tempered glass windshield. We spent the first night on the Hume Highway in a small town called Benalla. The next day we went on towards Sydney, and stopped for a while in Gundagai, where I saw the only aborigines of the entire trip, a mother and child in western dress on the main street. The Australians tend to be rather sensitive about their aborigines, whose situation is more or less comparable to that of the American Indian, though they are considerably more primitive and less numerous. We also saw in Gundagai a miniature marble 'palace' about a yard high, called the Rusconi Masterpiece, that had been 28 years in the making. And five miles beyond Gundagai we came across the "Dog on the Tucker Box" monument to the early settlers, whose dogs were apparently trained to sit on and guard the "tucker box" or food box.

That night we reached the national capital, the artificial city of Canberra. We got rooms in a motel and tried to look up John and Sally Bangsund, but they were not at home. The next day, which was Saturday, we toured Canberra. The city was designed for the site which had previously been sheep pastures by the American architect Burley Griffin, and finally completed after WWII. Very clean and neat and somewhat underpopulated. The government offers incentives for people to move there. The National Library and the ANZAC War Memorial Museum there are well worth seeing, and we had a nice cruise on a large cabin cruiser on the lake in the middle of the city (the lake is artificial too). During the cruise they served lunch and all the wine you wanted.

On Saturday night, Jack missed his passport and airline tickets, and found by phone that he had left them back in Benalla, 300 miles down the Hume Highway. So Jack and I spent Sunday driving the 600 miles round-trip to Benalla, about 12 hours. The highway speed limit is 100 km/hr or about 63mph, but there is little enforcement outside the towns. I took over driving at the Tucker Box monument (after getting a card for Tucker to sign for Mae Strelkov) and got caught in a classic speed trap five miles down the road in Gundagai - there was a notice that the limit dropped to 60kph (about 40mph), the road went over a rise, and there were the police with their radar, waving everybody into a wide shoulder. When the officer found that I was leaving the country in 3 days, however, he just gave me an 'official warning'.

Back in Canberra the next morning, we took the road to Sydney where we were to visit Ken Ozanne and Eric Lindsay out in Faulconbridge (we only got lost twice) and rejoin the tour group. Faulconbridge is a sort of distant suburb of Sydney (about 40 miles) in the Blue Mountains. Ozanne and Lindsay live within a mile of each other, and not far from the Clarke's place in Warimoo. We found Tucker alone at Ozanne's house, the rest of them having gone hiking. Ozanne owns the whole gorge behind his house, and Tucker told us about the waterfall and pool at the bottom, though it was getting to late for us to go down ourselves. We did go over to Lindsay's house, a large two-story brick residence where Eric keeps his collection and fan supplies - he actually lives with his mother nearby. He does not lock the door and fans wander in any time. Ozanne and many others turned up around dark, and we went back to Ken's place to see his telescope, a ten-inch reflector. He set it up in the yard and showed us some distant globular clusters and the twin stars of Proxima Centauri. We also were able to see the Southern Cross. Finally we went back down into Sydney around midnight where we had rooms at the Crest Hotel.

The next day was mostly devoted to wandering around Sydney and talking to the Sydney fans, who have already begun a campaign to hold the worldcon in 1988 - presupporting memberships have been sold, and Eric Lindsay has opened a bank account for the project. In the afternoon, many of the fans got out to see the fabulous Ron Graham collection. Ron Graham is a millionaire fan and lives in a remote corner of Sydney. In the con program book, he had a full-page ad inviting one and all to come out and see his collection, and in fact he ran a shuttle service from the hotel in his silver Rolls! It is a large collection, and he has built a special two-story addition to the house for it, with a bar and pool table on the first level and the collection above, in a room about 30x30 with library-style shelving. The pulps are in the usual order, but the books are filed strictly by size, in order to save space. However, everything is indexed by author and title. Many items are wrapped in plastic, but he told us to unwrap anything we wanted to look at. Graham donated several very rare items to the con auction, duplicates from his collection - a very good *OUTSIDER AND OTHERS*, a copy of *THE SHIP THAT SAILED TO MARS*, a copy of Ray Bradbury's fanzine *FUTURIA FANTASTICA*, etc. The rare books were bought for one of the university libraries, and I myself bought a little "History of the Necronomicon" printed by a friend of HPL in Oakman, Alabama. I shot some film here as well.

This was on Tuesday, and Tuesday night's hotel was provided by the Group Tour, the Hyatt Kingsgate where we had spent the first night in Australia, only a block from the Crest. On Wednesday, the Group Flight left for Auckland and four days in New Zealand.

Auckland is a nice small city of about 700,000. It was once the capitol of NZ, but the capitol is in Wellington now, as being more central. Tom Cockcroft lives near Wellington, but as it is 300 miles away and I had seen him at the con in Melbourne, I did not try to get down there. I did a little more shopping in Auckland, got my aunt some NZ stamps. I also saw the film *ROLLERBALL* for only \$1.50 in a very nice theater with 6 usherettes - but no popcorn. Oddly enough, they had an intermission after the first 25 minutes of the show, to show another 15 minutes of commercials, but then showed the rest without interruption. From Auckland, a bus tour to the Waitomo glow-worm caves and the Maori village in the sulphur springs region at Rotorua had been arranged. The caves were flooded out, but the rest of it was quite interesting. At a little roadside general store I noticed four of Don Grant's "Centaur Press" pbs - except they were printed in Israel for a British publisher, these may have been pirated. Most of them had copyrights assigned to "B P Singer", one to Glenn Lord.

In Rotorua we stayed in a very large fancy hotel with hot sulphur pool, but I had no suit and a bad cold and didn't get to go in, though many of the fans did spend a lot of time there. We also attended a Maori musical show, and a sheep-shearing and sheepdog demonstration at the "Agrodome".

Back in Auckland, we left for LA, some on Saturday Aug 30, but most on Sunday, Aug 31, at 8:10PM. Recrossing the Date Line, we got to LA on Sunday at about 4 PM. We had to go through immigration in Honolulu and Customs in LA, but as far as I know, no one had any trouble. I brought back about 30 pounds of books and zines, so I was well over the airline's weight limit, but they never even checked.

In LA, I had a few hour between planes, and got over to the Nasfic, which was at the Marriott near the airport. I was not asked for any money to enter, and the Trimble's reopened the art show for us in the evening, which I thought was very nice of them. I wandered through the Huckster rooms before they closed, and Elst Weinstein gave me two copies of his dictionary he said he owed me. I was delighted to see John Guidry there!

And then I came home....