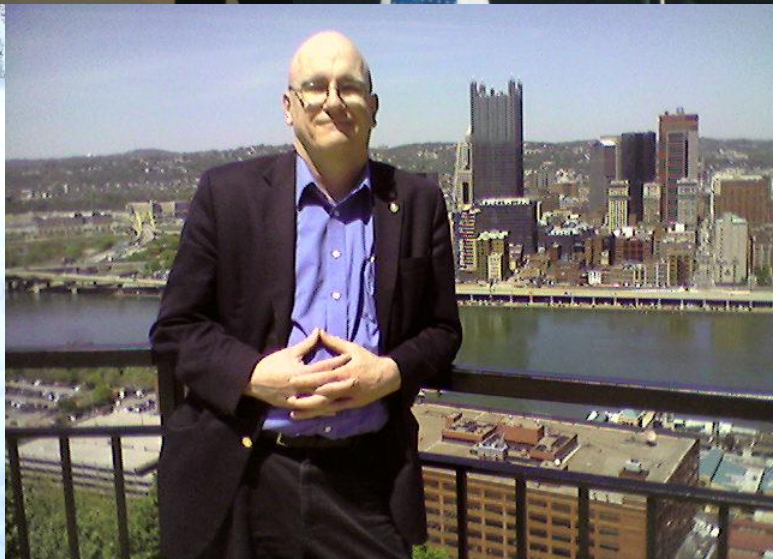
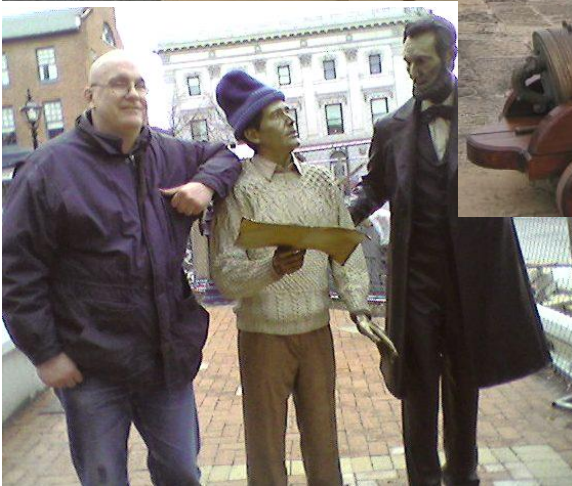


My Back Pages #2

Rich Lynch



My Back Pages #2

another mini-collection of my articles and essays

Welcome back to my world! It's been four months since the first issue of this personal anthology, and in the meantime the end of a long snowy winter has turned into the middle of a very warm summer. The annual World Science Fiction Convention is not far in the future and this year it's all the way down in Melbourne, Australia. I guess it's a sign of longevity that my wife Nicki and I have been to 26 previous Worldcons. But we won't be going to this year's convention. I work for an international activities branch in an Agency of the U.S. Government and while it is very rewarding, but I can't get more than two weeks leave at a time. That's not enough for an Australia convention trip, not with any reasonable amount of time to see the parts of the country that are beyond the walls of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

So instead, Nicki and I are attending the 2010 North American Science Fiction Convention in North Carolina. We've only attended two other NASFiCs, the most recent time back in 1999, when we were the fan guests of honor. Back then I was working for a different organization in the Department and I *could* get three weeks off in a row, so after the NASFiC ended, Nicki and I went directly on to Australia for the 1999 Worldcon. But it's a longer story than that...

Rich Lynch
Gaithersburg, Maryland
August 2010

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South by Southwest, An Antipodean Adventure

Somewhere over the South Pacific, on the Qantas flight to Melbourne, Australia:

Nicki: "How long have we been traveling?"

Rich (misunderstanding): "About two weeks."

Nicki: "No, not how long are we going to be in Australia; how long have we been on this flight?"

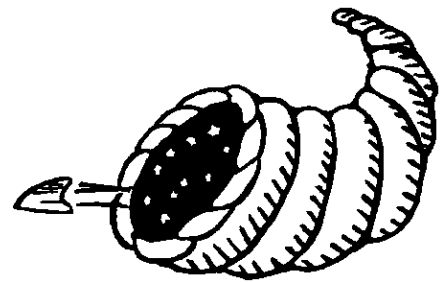
Rich: "Oh! About two weeks."

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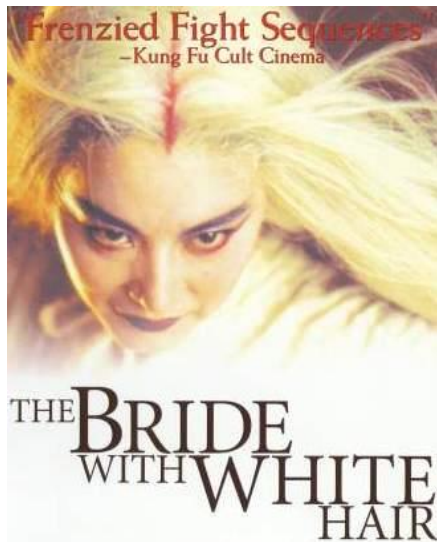
It takes a long, long time, even by air, to travel from North America to Australia. Well, maybe not two weeks, but it sure *seems* like it. It was the farthest from home either of us had ever been, to the most southerly Worldcon ever. Like many of our trips, this was a voyage of discovery; by the end of the trip, we felt we knew our way around a part of the world that had previously been as remote to us, subjectively, as the surface of Mars.

The trip actually began two years earlier, in San Antonio, at the 1997 Worldcon. It was there that the Los Angeles fan group, SCIFI, won the bid to host the 1999 North American Science Fiction Convention, which was to be held in Anaheim the week before Aussiecon Three, the 1999 Worldcon. NASFiCs don't happen too often, only when the Worldcon is across an ocean from here. We'd only been to one previous NASFiC (the 1979 NorthAmericon in Louisville) and, indeed, had no plans to attend the 1999 one either (Australia and Aussiecon were on our minds even then). But a telephone call from Bruce Pelz a few days before the 1997 LoneStarCon changed all that; he informed us that SCIFI wanted us to be their Fan Guests if they won their bid. It was a surprise; we haven't attended all that many conventions in the past few years, and there are certainly many other fans who are deserving of the honor. Nevertheless, it didn't take us long to accept. The bigger challenge was to figure out how we were going to pack the NASFiC, Aussiecon Three, and other parts of Australia all into one trip.

With the 1999 NASFiC, Conucopia, we've now been fan guests five times. At 2,000+ attendees, Conucopia was by far the largest convention of the five, and we were treated quite lavishly – a two room suite at the Anaheim Marriott and a special liaison, Genny Dazzo, who went way out of her way to make sure everything we wanted was there. We're not sure they got equal value in return; we were only asked to be on a handful of program items and the ice cream social that opened the convention. That was a fun event; instead of the usual 'Meet the Guest' cattle call, Conucopia set it up as a High School Reunion of George Orwell High, Class of 1984. There was even a small Photo Remembrance Book showing various pro guests and attending authors as 'teachers' and us as the Homecoming King and Queen. There were also pictures of the various scholastic organizations such as a the 'Light Saber Fencing Club', actually made up of local fans and members of the concom. A few times during the event we were even asked to sign the book under our photo. It was a pleasant way to start the convention.



We elected not to do speeches or be interviewed for our Guest of Honor event. Instead, we did a ‘live fanzine’, *A Mimosa Fanthology*. We felt the successes of *Mimosa* were probably the reason we’d been invited to be guests in the first place, so it seemed only right to let the fanzine (and thereby, our contributors) have much of the honor. So we brought a complete run of *Mimosa* to the convention with us, and picked out articles throughout the run that we would probably want to publish in a *Best of Mimosa* some day – one or two articles from each issue. It turned out to be a *lot* of material, way too much for even the three-hour slot of time we had available (we’d have needed double that to get through them all). The audience was a bit small, only about ten people – another sign that fanzine fandom has become just a small segment of science fiction fandom. Still, there were some avid fanzine readers there, and even one pro writer (Larry Niven); to keep as many around for as long as possible we enlisted some of them as readers; Mike Glycer, for instance, ‘channeled’ Ron Lee when he read Ron’s article “The Wrath of Khat” from *Mimosa* 3, while David Bratman pretended he was Mike Glycer when he read Mike’s “A Child’s Garden of Hugos” from *Mimosa* 14. Mike Glycer later wrote in *File* 770 that by using other fans as readers, we had “hit on a clever way to draw an audience to the marathon readaloud.” Thinking all the time, we are!



Being in the film center of the world, it would have been unusual if the convention committee had not taken advantage of the available resources and people who work in the industry. Media-oriented panels and events abounded, and there was even a Hong Kong movie festival, featuring some strange but yet pretty entertaining films of reasonable fantasy content (some featuring Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan when they were much younger). The strangest and maybe most entertaining of them all was *The Bride With White Hair*, which was described in the *Conucopia Pocket Guide* as “the best sword and sorcery movie ever made by anyone anywhere.” It might very well be! How best to describe it? How about: a ‘Magic Realism’ fairy tale where Chinese martial arts meet up with sorcery, with an heroic fantasy leading man, a mysterious beautiful witch who could ensnare victims in her long hair, and a fantastic yin-yang male-female villain who was leader of an Evil Cult. And on top of this, it was also a love story!

Besides the movies, there were also some television-related items, including a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* panel (that Nicki was on) which had the misfortune of being scheduled the same time as Harlan Ellison’s one man show. It resulted in a smaller audience than expected, though they made up for it in exuberance which carried through the divider walls – some of the attendees at the Ellison hour wondered if an even bigger event was being held next door.

J. Michael Straczynski was there, too, and his one panel item, expounding about the success of *Babylon 5* and his new series *Crusade*, filled the large meeting room where it was held. Most of the cast of *Crusade* actually came to Conucopia, supposedly to publicize an upcoming media convention being chaired by the chairman of Conucopia. Their appearance seemed to be mostly sitting behind a table and signing photographs for fans at five dollars a pop. They were the consummate ensemble cast; they stayed as a group when they weren't in the convention area, even eating breakfast together at the hotel restaurant that morning, one table over from where we were sitting. That resulted in an amusing moment when Rich accidentally stole two slices of toast at the buffet bar from Marjean Holden (who plays the ship's doctor). It might have been a good time to get introduced to them, but it was early in the morning and we really didn't seem to have much in common – other than a yen for buttered toast!

Conucopia was a good convention, very competently run, and we had a good time. It was also an essential convention for us – there wasn't much overlap with people who attended Conucopia and those at Aussiecon Three the next week, and if we hadn't gone to Conucopia, we wouldn't have seen them. Our friends Lowell Cunningham and Dorothy Tompkins from Knoxville, Tennessee, were there; we were pleased to learn that the success of the movie made from Lowell's *Men In Black* series for Dark Horse Comics is still bringing income for them. Once and future fanzine publishers Dick and Leah Smith were there, too, and we had an interesting dinner expedition with them one evening that also turned into an informal tour of downtown Anaheim. Elliott and Carole Weinstein brought a boysenberry pie with them for a late night snack with us and some other friends in our hotel suite. And then there was Bruce Pelz, who spent much of the convention sitting behind the Guest Sales table where he sold more than 100 copies of *Mimosa* over the weekend, not to mention the hundreds of dollars worth of books by the other Guests. It was a good place to sit down, rest, and watch the convention roll by, while talking with him about a far range of topics such as fan history projects, Worldcon politics, and vacation cruises. Much to our surprise, Bruce didn't go on to Aussiecon, breaking a Worldcon attendance string much longer than ours (which now stands at a relatively puny twelve years in a row). But an even longer string than that was broken for someone we had hoped to see at both Conucopia and Aussiecon – Forry Ackerman had other commitments, in Europe, and so broke his Worldcon attendance string that dated back to 1952.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. All too soon it was Monday night and we were at Los Angeles International Airport, where outside the departure lounge window there was a huge airplane with a kangaroo on its tail...

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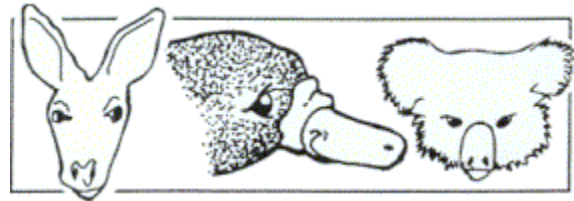
*“Tonight we will be flying fully one-third of the way around the world.”
– the Pilot of Qantas flight 100, Monday, August 30, 1999*

The world is a big place, especially the Pacific Ocean. It took seventeen hours to go from Los Angeles to Melbourne, just about all of it over water. You 'lose' a day in transit when you cross the International Date Line, and so Tuesday, August 31, 1999 for us will always be 'The Day That Never Was'. We were seated smack in the middle of the plane, in the center of an interior row, right over the wing; we were also smack in the middle of a group of about twenty science fiction fans who were also going to Australia for the Worldcon. Before the flight even got off the ground, there was a mini-convention of sorts in the Qantas departure lounge at LAX airport. It might have been bigger yet, but another large group of fans had instead booked on the United

flight, which left about an hour after the Qantas one. There was one intermediate stop, in Auckland, New Zealand, which has a very nice airport. Some day we'd like to see more of the city and country than just that. And at a time other than 4:30 in the morning!

It turned out that we didn't get to see much more than that of Australia – just Melbourne and Sydney; there wasn't enough vacation time left, after five days in California, to take an extended tour of the country like some other fans were able to do. We had to content ourselves instead with a

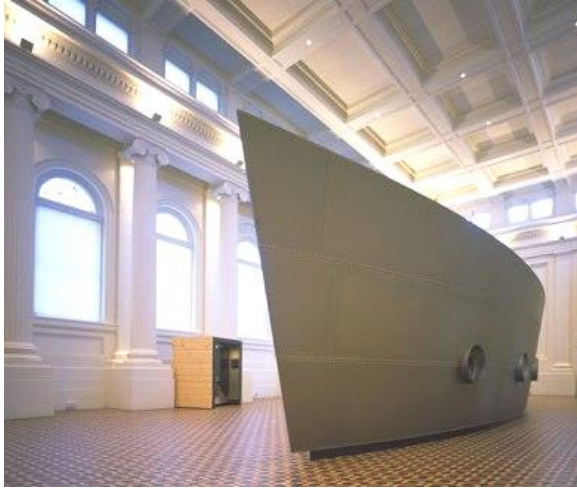
vicarious tour, listening to descriptions of various friends' travels, from Ayers Rock to the Great Barrier Reef, from Darwin to Tasmania, from the Blue Mountains to the Indian Ocean. But on the other hand, it turned out there was enough to do in Melbourne and Sydney that we never really felt pressed to take extended day trips. The only one we took our entire stay in Australia was a bus tour to the Healesville Animal Sanctuary north of Melbourne. There, we saw examples of just about all the indigenous wildlife of the continent, up close and personal. We found that echidnas and platypuses were a lot smaller than we'd imagined, kangaroos and wallabies a lot lazier, wombats and koalas a lot more gregarious, and lorikeets a lot more ubiquitous. Gift shops, though, seemed to be just about the same – the tourist dollar rules, no matter where you are.



one of Melbourne's City Circle Trams

Aussiecon was in Melbourne, so that's where we were for most of our stay Down Under. And the first thing we learned about Melbourne was to watch out for the traffic when crossing streets! Motorists drive on the left side of the road in Australia, and it wasn't five minutes into our first walk outside the hotel that Rich was almost run down by an automobile because he looked the wrong way for oncoming traffic. A much better, and safer, way to see the city was by riding the Melbourne city trams. They go practically everywhere, even out to some of the nearby suburbs. There's even a special nightly dinner tram – a restaurant on rails which travels a random path around the city as the night falls and the lights come on. (According to two of our friends who tried it, the

meal is a bit pricy, but the experience is unique.) A free City Circle Tram line loops around the rectangular-shaped business district of the city, and it's a good place to learn more about Melbourne – at each stop, a recorded message tells you a bit of history about one or two of the notable places nearby. It's a haven on chilly September days there, and not just for us tourists. We boarded the tram one afternoon for a 'circle tour' and sat down next to a much older man who seemed to welcome the opportunity to tell us even more about some of the buildings along the route. He was a pleasant traveling companion, and proved to be a veritable font of knowledge about the city. But he never got off the tram; he was still there when we disembarked after about 45 minutes. We decided that riding the tram was probably a cure for loneliness for him. Meeting and talking to people on the City Circle Tram was his life after retirement, and he was happy. We only hope we can find that much contentment in whatever we decide to do after our working days are over.



inside the Immigration Museum

As far as sightseeing went, we had mixed luck. The tram tour worked out fine, but the day we reserved for visiting museums was a bit less successful. The Immigration Museum was fascinating from a cultural and historical perspective, but it was small enough that it didn't take very long to go through it. The Victoria State Museum, which is supposed to be a wonderful art museum, was closed for renovation while we were there; all of it we got to see were a couple of interesting fountain sculptures outside. Not far from the Victoria Museum is a large park that featured something unusual – a flower clock on the side of a hill. It was in full bloom, but, being early spring, nothing else in the park was. We

eventually walked as far as the Melbourne Observatory grounds, passing through a large War Memorial along the way. The Observatory's snack bar, where we had lunch, set a new personal record for us – it was not only the most southerly point in our exploration of Melbourne, it became the most southerly place either of us have been in our lives!

The major things to do in downtown Melbourne are shopping and eating. *Especially* eating – there must be a restaurant in every other store front there, and there are many wonderful cafés and ethnic restaurants. Not so pleasing, though, were all the American fast food places, including 7-11 and McDonalds. As usual, we didn't bother with those, but it was clear from the advertisements we saw that their usual fare had acquired an Australian essence. For instance, the Big Mac (a.k.a. the 'Big Oz') had all the usual fixings – as well as a slice of beetroot!

While we enjoy eating, it seemed that much of our free time was spent shopping. The U.S. dollar is robust compared to the Australian dollar, so once we did the conversions, we found that the prices for just about everything were very affordable. There are several multi-story walk-through shopping malls in downtown Melbourne, but the best place to shop is the Queen Victoria Market. Located on several acres of valuable land just outside the center rectangle of downtown, the mostly open-air Market had just about anything you could ever need, all in one place – there was everything from farm produce to tourist souvenirs. It's where we bought most of our souvenirs and holiday gifts, and even the skirt Nicki wore at the Hugo Award Ceremony. There's a guided 'foodie' tour of the Market that Nicki and several other fans took on the Friday morning of Aussiecon, which included a plastic fork and napkin for tasting some of the foods available from the food vendors. It was the one tour of the trip where stomachs got tired before legs did!



Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne

The Centra Hotel and the adjacent convention center that hosted Aussiecon was located on the north bank of the Yarra River, just outside the circuit of the City Circle Tram. The view from the foyer lounge of ninth floor of the hotel, near where our room was, looked out across the river to the large gambling casino complex on the south bank. One of the features of the promenade between the casino and the river was a series of eight tall rectangular towers, situated like monoliths about every fifty meters along the terrace. These we came to know as the ‘Pillars of Fire’ because they had one other distinct feature – starting in the early evening until midnight, every hour on the hour they lit up the night sky with an orchestrated display of pyrotechnics as natural gas was discharged from their tops and ignited into large fireballs. When you viewed the display from the hotel across the river, you could see that the fireballs were shot off according to a programmed sequence – individually from left to right, then two at a time, then four at a time, and finally all of them at once. Then, to conclude each five minute show, they shot off some really *big* fireballs; from across the river, these looked to be about three stories tall. If you were standing near the base of one of the towers when one of these went off you might have thought the end of the world had arrived. You’d think that all this commotion every evening would serve to keep all the seagulls out of the area, but it doesn’t – between ‘performances’ we could see gulls using the tops of the towers as convenient lookout perches. We concluded that they must have some kind of warning when one of the fireball shows is about to begin – either that, or some of the restaurants in the casino complex have found a ready source of instant-cooked poultry!



the Pillars of Fire

The Worldcon itself was pleasant and friendly. There were far fewer people attending Aussiecon than who go to a North American Worldcon, so there weren’t many instances of overflowing crowds at program events. One exception was the *Buffy* panel, which had a larger attendance than even the one at Conucopia had! Nicki was once again on that panel (she was a last-minute addition); it was the only program event, other than the Hugo Award Ceremony, that either of us was on the entire convention.



As for the Hugo Awards, we were pleased and honored to be a nominee, but it was no surprise to us that *Mimosa* was not voted the Best Fanzine; we thought it unlikely *Mimosa* would be more popular with the voters than the local Melbourne-based fanzine, *Thyme*. It was a surprise, then, when Dave Langford’s newszine, *Ansible*, was announced as the winner. Dave, who was at the convention, may have felt the same way, too – his acceptance speech mostly expressed condolences to *Thyme*’s editor, Alan Stewart, who is also *Ansible*’s Australian agent. It was one of the few times we’d ever known Dave to be somewhat at a loss for words!

Not being on many program items does have its advantages, actually – you have a lot more time to do other things such as seeing what’s going on outside the convention center, or seeing other parts of the convention, or our favorite, meeting and talking to people. We did a lot of that during Aussiecon, with people we already knew and some we didn’t. We’re beginning to think that *Locus* editor Charlie Brown is starting to like us; he invited us over to his table one morning for breakfast, and the Aussiecon issue of *Locus* had a reasonably nice photo of us. And Greg Benford, the Guest of Honor, gave us some nice egoboo about *Mimosa* – he asked us to reconsider our decision to end publication, and even said he’d write another article for us for a future issue.

One new acquaintance for us was Justine Larbalestier, from the University of Sydney, who is researching a new book about the New York Futurians fan club of the 1930s and ’40s. There was a memorable dinner expedition with Mark and Vanessa Loney (and about a dozen other fans); we had met Mark and Vanessa during Mark’s three-year job-related assignment to the Washington DC area earlier in the decade. Mark was in charge of Aussiecon Publications (we were his ‘Maryland Branch Office’, in charge of production and distribution of the last three Progress Reports). That dinner featured good food and excellent conversation – when we could hear it! (We had been seated next to a very good, but very loud, folk music group.)

Our friend Adrienne Losin was at Aussiecon, usually camped out behind her table in the Dealers Room; we’ve known her since 1980 when she was traveling in North America and came to Tennessee (where we were then living) for one of the Chattacons. And finally there were Jon Blum and Kate Orman, who live in Sydney and write science fiction. We hadn’t met them before, but were on the lookout for them and finally ran into them the next-to-last day of the convention. The reason we wanted to meet them? Jon’s father, here in Maryland, asked us to. He’s our dentist.



me, Kate, Jon, and Nicki

There were fewer parties at Aussiecon than at any other Worldcon we’ve been to, no doubt partly due to its smaller attendance. The ones that did happen, though, became focal points for the convention after the program events were over each day. The ConJosé bid party was originally scheduled to go two nights, but was cut back to one when it became apparent that the bid was going to win handily (against a semi-hoax Roswell, New Mexico bid) and that the party budget wouldn’t be sufficient for two nights at the exorbitant catering rates the Centra Hotel had forced on them. Maybe it’s just as well; with the large crowd of people there, it wasn’t all that enjoyable an event. There was almost a competition to grab food while it was still available; a constant feeding frenzy developed as people jostled for position around the food bar, as if they were in an aquarium instead of a multipurpose meeting room. A much more laid-back affair was held in the same space the next evening by the ConCancun-in-2003 bidders, who actually *did* dress up the meeting room to look like an aquarium. A better use of resources for light snacks instead of dinner fare actually provided more to eat at a lower overall cost. And because it wasn’t a substitute for dinner, the party was less crowded as people cycled in and out more

frequently. The best party of all, though, was the one hosted by Japanese fans the last night of the convention. Upon entering, you were met by one of the hosts who gave you a cloth headband and helped to tie it around your head. Their secondary party, upstairs, even served saki in an ornamental ceramic cup that they then presented to you as a souvenir! Most of the Japanese fans who come to Worldcons speak English, but not all. The young lady dressed in traditional costume who greeted us at the door was having a nice time meeting people, but it was obvious she was having trouble with the language barrier. When Nicki commented to her on how wonderful her dress was, she was so anxious to understand what Nicki had said that she rushed across the room and dragged one of the other Japanese fans back with her to act as translator. Rich, accidentally standing in the way of all this, had to step lively to avoid becoming part of the carpet!

Even though Sydney is the largest population center in Australia, all three Antipodean Worldcons have been held in Melbourne. That's where most of the fans are. The local fan club, the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, meets every Friday night, and the number of people who attend is about the same for that of a typical Washington Science Fiction Association meeting. One of the reasons we spent an extra few days in Melbourne following the Worldcon was so we could go to a MSFC meeting, and we weren't the only ones who had that idea. The meeting we attended, on September 10th, also had several other out-of-towners. Kevin Standlee and Cheryl



Maureen and Paul

Morgan from California were there, trying to interest local fans in buying memberships to the 2002 Worldcon, ConJosé. Janice Gelb, the DUFF delegate, had completed her month-long stay in Australia and had gone back to the United States by then, but the current GUFF and TAFF delegates, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Kincaid Speller, were at the meeting, like us with cameras primed. (We'd taken several photos of each other during the convention – so many, actually, that we came to call them 'drive-by shootings'.) The MSFC meeting and the group dinner that preceded it turned out to be our best opportunity to meet local fans, even more so than Aussiecon. It was the only time we really had a chance to talk with the 1998 DUFF delegate, Terry Frost, and Aussiecon's Fan Guest, Bruce Gillespie (whose fine fanzine, *SF Commentary*,



Nicki, me, and Irwin

was surprisingly not a Hugo finalist). We didn't stay with fan friends during our additional time in Melbourne, but we did have meals with some of them – Alan Stewart and Donna Heenan one evening and Irwin Hirsh another. We'd been looking forward to meeting Irwin, whom we'd just missed several times during the convention. After our meal with him, he led us to the site of the previous two Melbourne Worldcons, the former Southern Cross Hotel – now a moribund site, fenced-off from the street and undergoing either a massive renovation or outright

demolition (we're not sure which). If we'd stayed in Melbourne one more day, Irwin was going to get us into an Aussie Rules football game which would have been fun. But by then we were in Sydney.

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“Sydney is a glittering, lively city with a fabulously beautiful harbour at its centre.”
– *Lonely Planet's New South Wales guidebook*

Sydney is a city that more than lives up to its reputation. We spent only three days there together – a severe miscalculation, as there's a lot more to see and do in Sydney than can be fit into a long weekend. We tried to maximize our remaining time, so we did some of the most obvious, touristy things, such as a tour of the Opera House and a Harbour Cruise, at first opportunity. In fact, we might have done the Harbour Cruise a bit *too* soon – our first night in the city we reserved for an evening cruise, but the recorded commentary that pointed out all the notable things to see on the shore was the same one used for daylight cruises. So when we were told that some of the mansions on the shore of Double Bay were owned by movie stars such as Kevin Costner and Tom Cruise, what we saw out there was mostly darkness. And when the recorded commentary described how you could get to the Sydney Zoo by taking an inclined railway from the ferry terminus at the harbour, all we saw up there was a black hole. Still, both the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge are spectacular at night, and the best view of each is from the middle of the harbour. So was it worth the fare? We thought so, but ours wasn't the only opinion. One of the other passengers on the cruise, a teenager with a backpack, must have been disappointed by the view, or else he'd seen it all before. Not two minutes after the ferryboat left Circular Quay he was sound asleep, and didn't awaken until the tour was almost over. We left the pier wondering if he had found that a gently-rolling boat was a personal cure for insomnia!

The more time we spent at the Circular Quay waterfront, the more certain we were that the real 'signature image' of Sydney, the one you remember best about the city, is the Harbour Bridge, not the Opera House. It's one of the largest steel arch bridges in existence and dominates the harbour skyline, though not everybody in Sydney likes it very well (some refer to it as 'The Big Coathanger'). You can see the bridge from almost every point of interest in the city, and we found that it crept into many of



"But it's too big to be a coathanger!"

our photos of Sydney, even the ones where we weren't trying to include it. About the only way avoid it was to actually *be* on the bridge when taking photographs! There's a pedestrian footway that crosses the bridge on its east side, the side the Opera House is on, and there are several places midway that are ideal for photographers. The only problem is the brisk winds, but there's a high mesh fence that will capture a hat on even the breeziest day. For the more adventuresome, there's the Bridge Climb, where it's possible to actually walk up the arch of the bridge to its very top, about 150 meters above the harbor, with only a waist-high railing between you and the abyss (though you're tethered to the railings for safety). The view up there is said to be spectacular, but the price is, too – about one hundred Australian dollars per person for the experience. We decided to take a pass on that. Something we found a little more accessible (as well as

affordable) was the Sydney Observatory, located on a hill not far from the bridge. There was more to see there than we thought; besides the usual complement of telescopes there were also some interactive video games that served to educate schoolchildren (and us oldsters too!) about the nature of the cosmos and some of the deep sky wonders it contains. But best of all, it was located in a picturesque park, on the site of an old fort, right there in downtown Sydney; it's not only a good place for astronomy, it's also a good place for events like wedding receptions, and there was one going on the day we were there. We might have joined the festivities, but we were dressed a bit too much like fans. Besides, our accents would have given us away!

Time passes too quickly. After our three days in Sydney, Nicki's vacation time had just about expired; as much as she wanted to extend the stay, it was time to return to North America. Rich's stay was actually a bit longer than that; he had a technical conference to attend in Singapore before he came home, so he remained in Sydney an additional five days, taking walkabouts in the scenic headlands that separate Sydney Harbour from the Pacific Ocean, trailwalking Pacific vistas near Bondi and Manly Beaches, and even spending a day touring and shopping with two North American fan friends (Jeanne Mealy and John Stanley, from Minneapolis) who were still in the country. Our trip to Australia was a true voyage of discovery for us, and what we'll take away from it are the myriad images and memories of people, things, events, and sights encountered along the way.

One of them happened the second night of our stay in Sydney. Susan Bellenger, a fan we'd met on the day trip to Healesville, invited us for dinner out to her home in Merrylands, where the skies are much darker than in Sydney or Melbourne. It was there that we finally got to view something we'd been wanting to see for decades – Alpha and Beta Centauri and the stars of the Southern Cross. The total unfamiliarity of the southern sky served to remind us how far we were from home, and how exotic the southern hemisphere was to us; the Southern Cross, like Australia had become for us after two weeks there, was the only part we felt we really knew anything about. There's a lot more to see and do Down Under; someday we hope we'll get another chance. But as for finally seeing the Southern Cross, it turned out there was a hidden connection for us that we hadn't known about: the second brightest star in the constellation, Beta Crucis, also has a more formal name. It's known as 'Mimosa'. ☼



Susan, Susan's mother, and Nicki

Southern Cross, like Australia had become for us after two weeks there, was the only part we felt we really knew anything about. There's a lot more to see and do Down Under; someday we hope we'll get another chance. But as for finally seeing the Southern Cross, it turned out there was a hidden connection for us that we hadn't known about: the second brightest star in the constellation, Beta Crucis, also has a more formal name. It's known as 'Mimosa'. ☼

Artist credits: Joe Mayhew (page 7); Sheryl Birkhead (page 6)

Afterword:

A lot has happened in the eleven years since Aussiecon Three. My friend Bruce Pelz died in 2002 and *Mimosa* itself passed from existence in 2003. Since this was originally published, Nicki and I have been guests at one other convention, the 2002 DeepSouthCon. Nicki has not yet been back to Australia, but I've returned there twice on business trips. And our consecutive Worldcons attended streak ended at 18 in 2007, when we decided that instead of attending Nippon 2007 we'd take a vacation trip to Italy. As you will see, that also was an epic adventure.

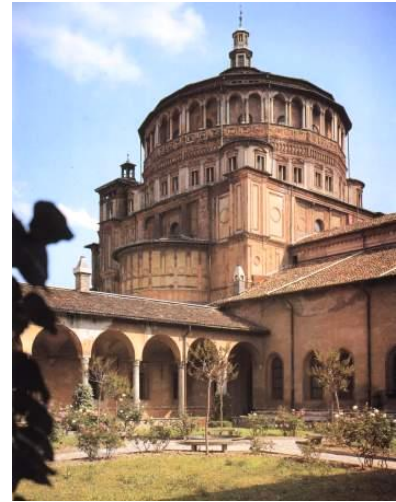
Italia 2007

Prolog: And the Last Shall be First

It was a rainy morning in Milan, the last of our ten days in Italy. When Nicki and I had planned the trip, we had decided that after a week and a half of finding our own way around, it would be time, on our final day in country, to treat ourselves to a guided tour. So there we were, in a small waiting room in the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, listening to the tour guide describe what would await us in the next, much larger room. And then it was time to see it – a large, faded painting that had not stood up very well in the five centuries since it was completed. But it was still a magnificent work of art.

It was Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*.

We were only allowed 15 minutes viewing time, and it went by very fast. And in retrospect, so did the entire vacation trip.



Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie

The Agony and the Ecstasy (of Traveling to Rome)

But let's start at the beginning, which in this case was back in February. I was able to trade 100,000 United miles for two round-trip economy airline tickets to Italy. No mean feat, as the airlines put up all kinds of hurdles to prevent you from getting free air travel. (And it wasn't, strictly speaking, "free", as we had to pay the various taxes that get subsumed into the final ticket price.) It took about fifteen minutes talking to a UAL customer service agent on the phone to find a 10-day window in the middle of August where we could make the trip exclusively on miles. If I'd tried to figure it out on the UAL website, I'd probably still be working on it.

What you give up when you pay for your ticket with miles instead of dollars is any chance of direct flights. United has them to Rome from Washington, but a direct flight is a commodity – far too valuable to be, in effect, given away. Instead, Nicki and I were given a three hour layover in Frankfurt, Germany, which is just about our least favorite airport in the universe.

It lived down to expectations – it is supposed to be a smoke-free environment, but there are little open-air kiosks set aside for smokers at many places in the concourse, and our gate was located not far from one of them. It made the long layover that much more an agony. We were already not at our best because of the cattle car flight to Germany in an old and very crowded 747. And to make things worse, an "unaccompanied minor" (to use airline lingo) had been seated next to us, and he had spent almost the entire flight wired on chocolate and sugar, constantly playing smackdown with his World Wrestling Federation action figures. By the time the connecting flight to Rome finally boarded (late), I was starting to wonder if this whole vacation trip was going to turn out to be one big mistake.

But then it started to get better. The connector flight to Rome was uncrowded, and there were spectacular views of the Alps. It turned out to be easy enough to find the express train into the Rome's central train station, and only slightly harder to figure out Rome's subway system to get to the stop near our hotel. After that it was just a five minute walk, rolling our suitcases behind us, and the trip was finally done.

When in Rome, Don't Do as the Scottish Do

We had originally planned on three fairly slow-paced days in Rome (which included our arrival day). But it was late afternoon by the time we got to the hotel, so we didn't do much more than walk down to Vatican City (maybe a quarter mile from where we were staying) and be awed by the interior of St. Peter's Basilica. There's a lot to see. Michelangelo's famous sculpture *Pietà* is in there, located immediately to the right after you go in the main front entrance. But what is really amazing is all the mosaic work, in the floors, walls, and ceilings. What looks like ornate painting is, once you get closer, an intricate mosaic made up from thousands and thousands of bits of glass and stone.



entrance to Vatican Museum

The next morning, we observed that we were not the only ones who had come to Rome on vacation. Thousands of others had braved the August heat, and most of them were in line ahead of us waiting to get into the Vatican Museum. "Line" is probably too polite a way to describe it; the sidewalk was filled, 8-10 people wide, and it extended for at least a quarter mile. The wait in line was two-and-a-half hours. But it was worth it; the Vatican Museum is one of the top ten art museums in the world, and going through it is the only way you can get to see the Sistine Chapel. An older couple from Glasgow, Scotland, were next to us; they were in Rome for only the day, apparently, and were under time pressure to get into the museum before they had to meet back up with their tour bus (which was heading south to Sorrento where they were staying). It seemed like very bad timing to us, but they were pleasant company for about an hour and a half before they realized they weren't going to make it in and gave up.



Nicki and a mosaic in St. Peter's

We stuck it out, and once we were inside the crowds thinned rapidly. You can go through the museum at your own pace, and it looked like many were making a beeline toward the Sistine Chapel, ignoring all the artwork in the galleries along the side of the main passageway. It takes maybe two hours to see everything at a reasonable pace, and by the time you finally do reach the Sistine Chapel you're fighting off sensory overload.

The Chapel itself is, as you might expect, the most crowded room. It was filled with people milling around, craning their necks looking upward trying to take it all in. We did a bit of that, too, but Nicki's eyes were soon drawn to the floor of the Chapel, where, inlaid as mosaics, there were some very familiar quilt block patterns, including what is now known as the "Ohio Star" and the Amish "Diamond in the Square." Art is where you can find it, sometimes in seemingly unlikely places.

Ma perchè Roma?

By the time we left the Vatican Museum it was late afternoon, but we still had something left to do before the end of the day – go to cupola at the top of the dome of St. Peter's. There's an elevator that takes you much of the way, where you can access the inside gallery at the base of the dome, providing a bird's eye view of the interior of the church from about 150 feet up. And from there it's 360 steps up to the cupola, in a narrow stairway between the inner and outer domes.

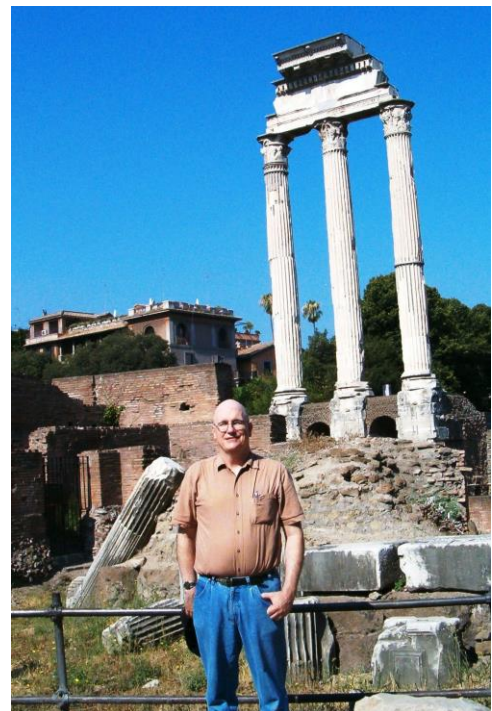


view of St. Peter's Square from the cupola

It's not something for the physically impaired or aged – it was a real effort to get to the top. But it was a clear day and the views were great, of St. Peter's Square, and farther away, the Pantheon and the Roman Colosseum. This was the main reason that Nicki and I decided to go to Italy for vacation instead of an iffy Worldcon trip to Japan or even a visit to other scenic parts of Europe – I wanted us to be able to do the dome climb. Ten or fifteen years from now, after retirement, who knows if we'd still be physically able.

Doing the Caesar Shuffle

It was worth an entire day to see the Vatican, but that left us only one more day to see what we wanted of the rest of Rome. And there was a lot to see. The guidebook we were using, *Rick Steves' Italy 2007*, had several self-guided walking tours, and the one we chose was a relatively short one, the "Caesar Shuffle". It started at the ruins of the Roman Forum, and from there next door to the Colosseum and then on to the Pantheon. The Forum is the best place to start, not just because it's free, but also because there is a ticket office there for the Colosseum that hardly anybody knows about. When we got there, mid morning, there were five people in line. Over at the Colosseum's main ticket office, there was a line of probably more than a thousand people, waiting in the hot sun. When we got to the Colosseum, we were able to get inside in less than five minutes. It must have taken more than an hour for those in the long line.



me at the Forum

It was such a hot day that we didn't spend very much of it in either the Forum or the Colosseum. But you don't really have to – there are many good photo sites, plus some annotated historical displays, but they do not take nearly as much time as a museum visit. But there is definitely a sense of history, as you stand amid the ruins. You start wondering, what must have happened here two millennia ago? Am I

standing where Caesar once walked? And what did it look like before everything fell into ruins? There are posters for sale at some of the vendors that show an imagined aerial photograph of what ancient Rome looked like back then. But for one building, that's not even necessary. The Roman Senate has withstood the ages, and is still standing.

Et tu, Goofy

After three hot and sweaty days in Rome we were about ready to move on to Florence, but not until we had a chance to do some shopping. Nicki collects Italian mosaic jewelry, but here in the United States the only place you can find it is in antiques and collectables malls. Turns out that it's still being produced in Italy, but we were surprised that the places to look for it are in the souvenir shops (though they had mostly the cheaper, lower quality stuff). There are also shops, if you can find them, that are outlets for the mosaic craftspeople, and that's where the best stuff is available. Some of the micromosaics I saw for sale at a shop near St. Peter's Square were just incredible – they were the size of paintings, and if you didn't look very closely, they even looked like paintings. There was one of the Roman Colosseum I was admiring that didn't even have a price tag. Just for the heck of it, I asked the sales lady how much, and I was told I could have it for a mere 18,000 euros. Ouch! Just another example of “If you gotta ask, you can't afford it.”

There was one other shop where we saw some mosaics, but not ones that were for sale or even transportable for that matter. Nicki also collects small dress-up Pooh bears, so we visited the Disney Store, on Via del Corso, to see if there were any Imperial Rome-themed Poohs for sale. There were not, but we were amused that the store itself was Imperial Rome-themed, with caryatid columns in the form of Goofy dressed in a toga, murals of Donald Duck as Caesar and Daisy Duck as Cleopatra... and a floor mosaic of Pluto. Cave Canem!



mosaic of Pluto in Rome's Disney Store



Roberto and Nicki

Staying at Roberto's Place

The train ride to Florence from Rome only took about an hour and a half. We took a taxi to the hotel, but it turned out that Florence is such a compact city we could have walked it in about 20 minutes. The hotel, Olga's House, turned out to be not really a hotel at all – it advertised itself as a “tourist rooms” place, and there were only six rooms total. The location was spectacular – just half a block from the largest plaza in the city, the history- and museum-filled Piazza delle Signoria. The only problem was that the hotel was located up on the third floor, 80 steps up, and there was no elevator. But there was a nice view of the market, the room was very clean and relatively spacious, and, being up that high, there was very little street noise, especially at night. We asked Roberto, the owner, why his establishment was named “Olga's House” and he said it was named for his stepdaughter. He

told us he had, years ago, become infatuated with a Russian flight attendant and had married her, and brought her and her daughter to Florence. But that was the high water mark – the marriage eventually soured and now he runs the place by himself, calling in various services as needed. Breakfast doesn't really come with the room at Olga's House; it's just too small. Instead, Roberto gave us vouchers good for breakfast at one of two cafés in the Piazza delle Signoria. And it turned out that one of them, the Café Perseo, is perhaps the best place in the universe for a dessert that is uniquely Italian – gelato.

The Food of the Gods

There are many nice things to experience in Florence, and one of the best is the gelato. The guidebooks say it is better there than anywhere else in Italy. From Nicki's and my experience that's certainly true. It's made from milk and sugar and flavorings such as fruit concentrates, or better, fresh fruit. Good gelato is made right there on the premises of places that sell it; it's not unusual to go to a place like Café Perseo and discover that none of the wonderful flavors from the previous day were for sale – they had been replaced by a new set of equally wonderful flavors because a different selection of fresh fruit was available.



Café Perseo, the gelato nexus of the universe

Gelato is not the same thing as ice cream; to me it's much less creamy and much more dense than ice cream, and the flavors really jump out at you. This is especially true of the mixed berry-flavored gelatos, which were my favorites. Nicki thinks that the melon-flavored gelato was also superb, and one afternoon we were strolling through the Piazza delle Signoria we took turns sampling each other's gelato to try to make up our minds which was better. All the while, crowds of people were scurrying about taking photos and consulting their maps. Nicki noticed this and reinforced the goal of the afternoon: "We're only here for the gelato."

Under the Tuscan Sun (and Moon)

But we were, of course, in Florence for more than just the food. We reserved a full day just to see the two most important art museums in Florence. Just across the Piazza delle Signoria from us was the Uffizi Gallery, which is perhaps the best art museum in the world for Italian Renaissance paintings. There are works by DaVinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian and others in there, but the star attraction is a Botticelli painting, *The Birth of Venus*, sometimes (incorrectly) referred to as "Venus on the Half Shell". There is a sculpture garden of sorts in the Piazza near the Uffizi, which contains many recognizable works, including Benvenuto Cellini's famous bronze of Perseus holding a sword in one hand and the severed head of Medusa in the other. The most famous sculpture there, however, is Michelangelo's *David*, but it's only a reproduction. The original is in the Accademia Gallery, a few blocks to the north, which also contains four other very powerful but unfinished Michelangelo sculptures collectively titled *Prisoners*.

It turned out that Michelangelo himself is also on display, sort of, in Florence, as are other notable residents of the city. The Church of Santa Croce, a five minute walk from our hotel, is also the burial place of many famous residents of Florence and the surrounding Tuscany region of Italy. Michelangelo's mortal remains are entombed there, as well as Galileo, Machiavelli, and the opera composer Rossini.



Church of Santa Croce



Piotr Tomaszewski

the Uffizi Gallery, where it adjoins the Piazza delle Signoria, is a place where buskers perform every afternoon and evening. One evening there was a violinist, a conservatory student making a bit of spending money, who was playing Mozart and Vivaldi. Just to see how good he was, I asked him to play some of Bach's "Chaconne" and he did, very well. He wasn't exactly Joshua Bell, but for the cost of one euro in his violin case, we got more than our money's worth. Besides him, one other night we listened to live music from an instrument you wouldn't normally associate with Italy – bagpipes (with guitar accompaniment). The two musicians played an assortment of reels and jigs, and then had a beer break and apparently called it a night. The best of all was a classical guitarist from Poland named Piotr Tomaszewski, whose signature piece is "Asturias," a very pleasing composition by Spanish composer Isaac Albéniz. In the hour or so we watched him, he took in maybe 100 euros in contributions and sales of his CD. If he wanted to stay in Florence permanently, he could probably live on that.

The Traditions of Florence

In the four days we were in Florence, the thought of someday staying there permanently did come up once or twice. It's very nice, and on sunny and warm summer days like we had it was only too easy to spend time slowly, while observing the sights and sucking down as much gelato as we could. The signature image of Florence is the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (a.k.a. the Duomo), a Gothic cathedral dating back to the early 1400s with a very picturesque dome – the first one that had been built since the time of the Roman Empire. It also has a dome climb, but after the struggle to get to the top of St. Peter's, it wasn't something we wanted to repeat any time soon. The plaza around the Duomo was a popular hangout for tourists and sightseers, but an even more popular place was the Ponte Vecchio, the one remaining medieval bridge over the

Arno River. The bridge contains many shops and is now a high-end shopping district, mostly for gold and jewelry, but at the center of the bridge there is a bust of the 16th century sculptor Benvenuto Cellini. The railing around the statue has acquired the tradition that young men, to show their undying love for their girls, would attach a padlock to the railing and throw the key into the Arno. But while love may be enduring, the padlocks are not. The city maintenance people cut them off every evening.



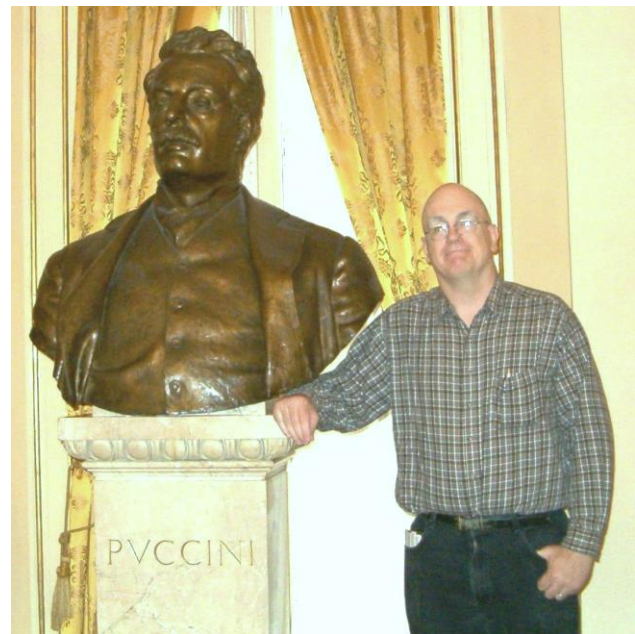
Nicki and Porcellino

One other tradition of Florence, one that the city fathers *do* encourage, is associated with the small marketplace (the “Straw Market”) just down from our hotel room window. Besides all the vendors, there is a small bronze statue of a wild boar (named “Porcellino”), and if you toss a coin in the grating by the boar’s feet and rub its snout, it will ensure that you will return to Florence. It was a tradition we were happy to continue. Florence is a great city.

On to Rainy Milan

We had no expectations that Milan would be as interesting or as entertaining as Florence, and it wasn’t. But not for lack of trying. Besides *The Last Supper*, Milan is home to the world’s most renowned opera house, La Scala, and it, also, has a very magnificent cathedral in the city center.

We saw them all, but not with the same vigor that we had in Rome and Florence. There was a lot of rain the two days we were in Milan, and that’s probably what contributed to our relative lack of enthusiasm for the city. The guided tour turned out to be a good idea; it’s doubtful we would have seen very much of the city without it. We did discover a few things on our own, but they were mostly the inside of restaurants and cafés.



inside La Scala

Our hotel in Milan was the most luxurious of the three places we stayed – August is apparently off season, so we were able to get into a four star hotel for about the same rate we paid for the tourist hotel in Florence. The room was spacious and quiet, and also dark at night. The hotel had free Internet access, free tea and snacks off the lobby, and a pretty good complimentary and delicious breakfast each morning which we very much enjoyed. Except for the last morning, when we had to be out the door by 4:30am to catch the express bus to the airport. But the early morning wake-up really didn’t bother us too much – we were finally ready to go home.

Epilog: People We Met Along the Way

It's inevitable, during a ten day trip, that you will meet a few memorable people. We certainly did. One of them was our tour guide in Milan. She was very knowledgeable about the city, of course, but she also had to be fluent in both English and German. And she was also amusing, though not intentionally so. At one point in the tour, as she was describing one of the historic buildings to the German-speaking tourists, the bus bumped the curb with a jolt and a loud crunch. It surprised her so much that she interrupted her spiel with a loud "Mamma mia!" and then continued on in German as if nothing had happened. It was comical enough that we both burst out laughing.

We met a couple from the United Kingdom who were also staying at our hotel in Milan. They were also in Milan for sightseeing, but we were a bit surprised that Milan was the entire extent of their Italian holiday. Our last evening of the trip we had a very pleasant, enjoyable extended conversation with them, so much so that we exchanged contact information and hope we will cross paths again.

The most memorable of all, though, was Constantino, a waiter at the Casa Del Vin Santo restaurant in Florence. We liked the place so much that we ate there three times, and Constantino was our waiter for two of those meals. We learned that he was actually from Bucharest, Romania (and he was surprised to find out that I'd been there twice). He spoke English very well, and said he had learned it on the job, by listening to customers. But he is apparently not planning to become an Italian citizen – his wife and little girl are still in Romania and he goes back there every so often. He was an irrepressible, amusing guy, and he liked us enough that he made us a deal on a very good bottle of wine for our last dinner in Florence.



Constantino the waiter

We made sure to have another waiter take our photo, of course, but it was mostly as a keepsake – as we were leaving we shook hands and I said to him, "We may not see you again." But he smiled and said, "Yes you will. You will be back in a few years and I will be running this place."

On both counts, I am hoping he is right. ☀

Afterword:

Three years on, Nicki and I have not yet been back to Italy. I think it's inevitable we'll return, but it may be after I retire a few years from now.

Anyway, one of the joys of traveling, both in distance and through life, is the memorable people you meet along the way. In the course of my lifetime, I have met many, many memorable people, and not always in person. In 1991, while I was doing supporting research on a book about the history of science fiction fandom in the 1950s, I entered into correspondence with Noreen Shaw, who was one of the most prominent science fiction fans of that era. She became a close friend, even though I only got to meet her once, and I was saddened by her passing in 2005. Here's a remembrance of her I wrote for my online LiveJournal.

Remembering Noreen

I saw this earlier today on one of the mailing lists that I subscribe to:

“Noreen Shaw, widow of SF editor Larry Shaw, co-chair of the 1955 World SF Convention, and co-editor with Larry of 1962 Hugo-nominated fanzine *Axe*, has died.”

Noreen Shaw was a friend. Most of my memories of her are from correspondence – she was a recipient of the fanzine I co-edited (*Mimosa*) and though I could never quite get her to write us an article of fan historical interest (as was usually most of the contents of any issue) she would still send us pleasant and usually anecdotally entertaining letters of comment that often – and to me, a fan historian, even a bit infuriatingly – hinted about some amusing little vignette from the 1950s or 1960s that begged to be preserved in print.

I only met her in person once, at the 1996 Worldcon. She’d written me she would be coming to the convention, even though she didn’t have a membership. I was able to convince the convention registration people to give her a day pass, and I ended up spending several very pleasant hours with her. I escorted her to the Retro-Hugo presentation, and got her into the Green Room where she was greeted warmly by Fred Pohl and Harlan Ellison.

That might very well have been her last science fiction convention – she told me that correspondence had become the extent of her fan activities and that the only reason she wanted to come to the L.A.Con was to see some old friends and meet some of the people she wrote letters to. And it was a chore for her to get there – she lived in a suburb of L.A. and had to take several long bus rides to get from home to the convention. I offered to try to find some easier way home, but she said she didn’t mind riding the bus and would hear no more of it.

One other thing about her that I remember from that day is how much she looked like my mother. Even though my mom is not a fan, all the time I was with Noreen I almost believed I was a second-generation fan. An unusual memory, perhaps, but one that I treasure. She’s gone, and I am already missing her. ☀



Noreen Shaw in 1955

Afterword:

Nicki’s and my trip to California in 1996 for that L.A.Con turned out to be memorable in its own right, and included an encounter with an oversize moose and squirrel on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, accidentally gate-crashing the Worldcon equivalent for belly-dancers in San Francisco, a tour of Forrest J Ackerman’s Ackermansion in the Hollywood Hills, and losing the Best Fanzine Hugo (to Dave Langford’s *Ansible*) by just eight votes.

One other highlight from the trip was a dinner, the night before the Hugo Ceremony, with some friends including author Allen Steele, who *did* win a Hugo Award (for Best Novella). I think he is a terrific writer, so I was pleased, years later, when the online magazine *SFRevu* offered me the opportunity to review one of his novels. Here it is again...

Coyote Frontier by Allen Steele

as reviewed by Rich Lynch

It's probably a fair statement to say that Allen Steele may be the closest thing the science fiction world now has to Robert A. Heinlein. Heinlein's fiction provided not only a strong and intelligent "sense of wonder" that is characteristic of the science fiction genre, it also made sense from a socioeconomic aspect – things and events in his stories made down-to-earth sense to the reader, even if many of those things and events were not yet scientifically possible. This gave Heinlein's stories and novels a much greater sense of humanity than most other writers of his era. Allen Steele's fiction resonates with the reader in much the same way. Most notable is his extended "Near Space" series of stories and novels, where mankind has succeeded, amid many fits and starts, of establishing various footholds amid the inner solar system. It is a future history in every bit of the Heinlein mold, and the fiction is as compelling as Heinlein's in both a sense of wonder and a socioeconomic viewpoint.

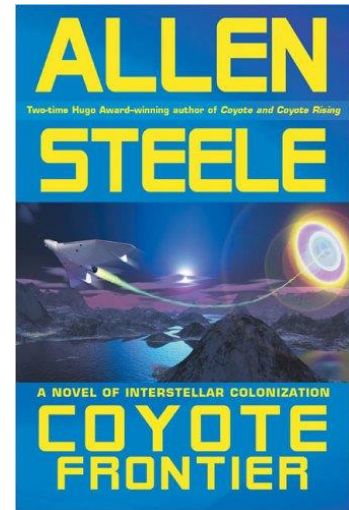
The "Near Space" series succeeded in elevating Steele to one of the most respected writers in the field and led to his first Hugo Award in 1996 for the novella "The Death of Captain Future." There have not been any new stories in that series for several years, but Steele has gone on to create other series that have in their own way been equally groundbreaking. The best of these is the Coyote series, which began as an extended series of stories that resulted in two Hugo Award nominations for Steele in 2002 for the novella "Stealing Alabama" and the novelette "The Days Between." These were all collected into the first two novels of the series, *Coyote* and *Coyote Rising*.

The premise of the Coyote series is that by the year 2070, the United States had regressed into a far right-wing fascist political entity named the United Republic of America. As the series opens, earth's resources have become depleted to the point where the sustainability of civilization might eventually become questionable, so the URA is on the verge of launching an interstellar spaceship to the star system 47 Ursae Majoris, where scientists have determined a habitable world may exist. That ship, the URSS Alabama, was to bring both colonists and its political system to the new world on a trip that would last for more than two centuries, though the colonists, through cold-sleep hibernation, would experience no aging. However, these plans were upset when the captain of the Alabama led a successful conspiracy to hijack the ship, replacing the hand-picked colonists with a group of dissident intellectuals who would instead create a free society on the new world. What follows, in the first two books of the series, are the trip, and then the first steps of colonization and exploration of Coyote. By the end of the first book, the initial colony of Liberty has survived its first few years and is well-established to the point where there have been some efforts of looking outward to the rest of Coyote. But as the first book ends, there is a surprise for the colonists: another, much larger, starship from earth arrives bearing thousands of new colonists and, worse, another political system that is to be imposed on Coyote – this time a far left-wing communistic "social collectivism." The second book of the series, *Coyote Rising*, deals with how the original colonists attempt to liberate their world from this new and, as it turned out, equally repressive social order. As the second book ends, success has been achieved, but at a price.

And so we come to this final book of the trilogy, *Coyote Frontier*. The setting is about fifty earth years after the end of *Coyote Rising*, and the situation is that exploration of Coyote is still

in progress, but the colonists have now proceeded into the development and exploitation stage. And with any rapid development comes problems associated with that development – in this case the sustainability of the available resources, the need for specialized equipment and machinery that is not readily available, conservation of indigenous life, and a growing displeasure of some of the colonists who do not want Coyote to become like the planet that the original colonists had escaped from. These new problems become especially acute when a new method of instantaneous travel between the stars involving wormholes is developed, which brings Coyote only days instead of decades from old earth and the political powers there that are turning a prospective eye toward Coyote as a place where excess population can go and from which needed resources can come.

Unlike the previous two books, *Coyote Frontier* (or most of it, at least) does not appear to be a “fix-up” novel that blends together the various shorter works of the series into a novel. That’s good from a continuity viewpoint, but on the other hand, as in any final book of a trilogy, there are many loose ends to tie up which often results in a relentlessly hurried and forced narrative. Steele is such a good writer that this is not very noticeable in *Coyote Frontier*, but there still seemed to be a slight sense of “let’s get this done with and move on to something new.” Because of this, I don’t think that *Coyote Frontier* is the best book of the trilogy, but there is still quite a lot to like about the novel. Plot dependencies from the previous books aside, Steele has constructed *Coyote Frontier* so that it can legitimately be read as a stand-alone novel. And it succeeds as such – it is a complex and well thought-out true sense-of-wonder novel, two or three books in one, with Heinleinesque who-do-you-trust political intrigues, an insurgency that could bring the wrath of old earth anew onto Coyote, and even the implications of First Contact.



From the way the book ends, it seems unlikely there will be future novels in the Coyote series even though there is certainly room for more stories, either as prequel or sequel. On the one hand, you have to hope that Steele will eventually decide to take the series farther, or in some new direction. But on the other hand, one of the characteristics of a good writer is the ability to not only create such a complex and interesting “universe” of related stories, but to also know when it’s time to move on to something else. Allen Steele *is* that good a writer. I, for one, can’t wait to read what he writes next. ☀

Afterword:

SFRevu, where the review was published, has a very polished-looking website but it’s not exactly the *New York Times Book Review*. If there was ever any feedback from readers, I never saw it. So it came as a pleasant surprise when an excerpt from my review was used on the back cover of Steele’s next book to promote the paperback publication of *Coyote Frontier*.

Allen Steele’s Hugo that he won in 1996 for “The Death of Captain Future” was his first of what I hope will be many. Nicki and I had received our first Hugo Award, for *Mimosa*, four years prior to that, on the evening of September 5, 1992, under circumstances that had never happened before (and hopefully will never be repeated). Here’s more about it.

What *Really* Happened the Night of September 5, 1992, and Other Conspiracy Theories

You know, I never used to be a great believer in conspiracy theories. I'd always thought that the Warren Commission was right all along with the 'single bullet' theory, and that the 'October Surprise' of 1980 really *was* just a figment of overactive imaginations. I'd even believed that the Boston Red Sox lost Game 6 of the 1986 World Series to the New York Mets because of the unpredictable bounce of a baseball. No longer! I've changed my mind because unlucky and unlikely things have been happening to me. Lots and lots of them. Too many, I think, for mere coincidence to explain.

Let me give you some examples of the kinds of things I'm talking about. Quite a few times in the past year or so I've been caught up in some kind of traffic tie-up caused by minor accidents or breakdowns, but they only seem to occur in the lane *I* happen to be in. Also, I've lost count of the number of times on my morning drive to work that I've endured a five-minute delay at our street corner waiting for traffic to clear, where if I'd arrived at that corner just ten seconds earlier the intersection would've been clear. And it's more than just traffic inconveniences. Supermarket checkout lanes I'm in are *always* the slowest; I never seem to have a dollar bill crisp enough to work in a coin changer; the important piece of mail I'm expecting is the one that gets delivered late, or is lost by the Postal Service; the Metrorail train that arrives the station first is always the one going the other way. It goes on and on. The workings of chance just can't explain all of this; I'm beginning to think it's all got to be caused by Something Else. (I'm going to read the *Illuminatus* trilogy to see if there's an explanation.)

And now larger events are even starting to follow this pattern. Last June, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of my high school graduation, I decided to attend the annual alumni dinner/gathering. I hardly ever get back to that part of far northern New York State (Jefferson County) any more. It's well off the beaten track and pretty rural – almost wilderness in places, in fact; the only city in the county (Watertown) is a small one, and most of the people live in dozens of smaller towns and villages.

I grew up and went to school in one of those small villages. For some reason or other, probably due to the independent nature of the people who live there, the school district for that township has never been consolidated with surrounding communities; the school I attended was one of the smallest in the state. It was so small that the entire school, K through 12, could be contained in one building; it was so small that my Senior class consisted of seventeen people.

There are advantages in attending a school that small, though, and one of them is that you get to know every one of your classmates pretty well. That's what, well, *compelled* me to attend this particular alumni dinner. It had been over twenty years since I'd been to one, and since I'd met up with anybody from my class. I had decided that I wanted, *needed*, to know what had become of everybody in the last two decades, and thought that if anybody else from my class would go to an alumni event, it would be on some special anniversary like this 25th.

Well, it didn't turn out that way. I met several people I knew from other graduating classes (one was a former Miss New York State) and also a few teachers (including even my Kindergarten teacher), but only one other person from my class of seventeen was there. I'd wanted to give him one of my business cards, but there wasn't any way he was going to look at it. Only a few years after graduation, he'd had surgery to remove a brain tumor, and was now blind.

I only bring this episode up to support my contention that there *must* be some cosmic consciousness out there somewhere that seems to enjoy playing tricks on me. There *has* to be! It's gotten so that even when things go well, *something* unpredictable invariably seems to happen that distorts any satisfaction.

A more visible example of this, one that lots of people witnessed, in fact, happened during the Hugo Award Ceremony at Magicon, the 1992 Worldcon. It was the Infamous Hugo Mix-Up, where the Best Fanzine Hugo was at first incorrectly awarded to *Lan's Lantern* instead of *Mimosa*. Not surprisingly, I later found out that this was the first time a Hugo Award had ever been incorrectly awarded. Now, with all the Hugos that have ever been presented over the years, the odds of such a screw-up are much less than one-in-a-hundred (since this is the first time that's happened). The odds against this happening in the category I (and my wife Nicki) were nominated in are over ten times greater yet. Even less likely is the added coincidence that it happened the one year we were fortunate enough to win. When you combine all of these long-shots together, the odds against all this happening to us may have been worse than for winning the \$20 million jackpot in the Florida lottery drawing that night. But there was even more: most coincidental of all, the error wasn't corrected until the worst possible moment. For that, though, a description of what happened that evening is in order...



Hugo Ceremony host
Spider Robinson

Nicki and I (as well as the other nominees) had endured a prolonged wait during the pre-Hugo nominees briefing and the start of the Awards Ceremony. We didn't expect it to drag on for so long, but by the time the first Hugo had been handed out, well over an hour had passed. Just before leaving the Green Room, I had paid a quick visit to the restroom, heeding a time-honored maxim about travel: "When on the road, never miss an opportunity to eat or take a pee." Nicki, however, had not, thinking the Ceremony couldn't possibly last more than about an hour. It didn't seem such a big deal at the time, but it would soon become important.

Besides the long wait, there were some technical glitches that slowed things down a bit, too; separate slides were projected for each nominee, but since the Ceremony's host, Spider Robinson, couldn't see the projection screen from his podium, his reading of nominees sometimes got out-of-synch with the projected slides. (Also, after each winner was announced, there was one additional slide that summarized the category and winner; knowing this will help readers better understand what happened next.)

The Best Fanzine Hugo Award was the third one announced. By the time Spider read the names of the nominees, it seemed as if all the glitches had finally been fixed – the correct slides, showing a photo of each fanzine, were projected at the proper time. Spider then opened the envelope that was handed him and read that the winner of the 1992 Best Fanzine Hugo Award was...*Lan's Lantern*.

Just as *LL*'s editor, George Laskowski, was taking possession of the trophy, above him on the screen flashed up a slide. It read:

**Best Fanzine Hugo
MIMOSA
Editors, Dick and Nicki Lynch**

From where we were sitting, you could almost feel the murmur that rippled through the crowd. At that point, Nicki felt the sudden conviction that there had been some kind of screw-up, and that *we* had won, but I was less sure. I thought that there must have been a 'winners' slide made up for each nominee, and the wrong one had been projected – it was just the latest in a series of glitches.

George's acceptance speech was very brief; when he finished, he departed backstage. And the Ceremony went on. Three more Hugos were awarded, which led us to think that the slide *was* in fact wrong, rather than the card in the envelope. At that point, Nicki decided that she had to leave the convention hall for the ladies room; there no longer seemed to be any reason why she shouldn't. But less than a minute after she left, Laskowski came back out on-stage holding the Hugo. Spider Robinson then announced that there had been a mistake, and that *Mimosa* was in fact the winner.

Now what?! As I stood up, looking for Nicki, well-wishers seated around me patted me on the back and shoulder, all the while easing me toward the aisle. I made it as far as the stage, but still no Nicki in sight as I desperately peered into the now ominously silent hall. Then it dawned on me – everybody was waiting for me to say something.

With four months hindsight to help me, I now know what I should have done at that point – I should have temporarily refused accepting the trophy, asking the crowd's indulgence so that we could all come out again after a surprised Nicki had returned. That's what I *should* have done. Unfortunately, what I *did* do was blurt out that "I wish Nicki was here with me, but she just left the hall to go to the ladies room."

To that, Spider said, "That sounds like a good idea; let's *all* go to the ladies room." Low comedy indeed, but that's what happens when you're stalling for time.



1992 Best Fanzine Hugo Award

In the end, there just wasn't enough time – I had to read both parts of the short acceptance speech we'd written, then departed the stage dejectedly. It was unfortunate and unfair to Nicki that she didn't get her moment on stage, but there was nothing that could be done about it.

Or was there? Nicki returned to the Hugo Ceremony just in time to see me leave the stage, and to catch a glimpse of the 'MIMOSA' slide we'd seen earlier. She immediately came backstage, and hadn't been there even a minute when we heard a commotion and were waved back on-stage to re-accept the award. The rest of the Hugo Ceremony was a complete fog; we were aware of other awards being presented, but we had to read the daily newsletter the next day to find out who many of the winners were. We were in such a haze that we never made it back to our seats – we'd forgotten where we'd been sitting!



me, George Laskowski, and Nicki following the 1992 Hugo Award Ceremony

So you see, things happen to me that just seem to defy all the laws of probability. I find that now whenever I make plans to do anything, it's under the presumption that something strange or unlikely is going to happen, and I'd better be ready for it. From now on, whenever I see anything unusual reported in the news, no matter how wild it sounds, I'm probably going to wonder, at least a little, if it really, truly *was*.

And the next time anybody asks me what I've been reading recently, I'm going to recommend my new favorite author...Charles Fort! ☀

Afterword:

Eleven years later, Spider Robinson was also host of the Hugo Award Ceremony at Torcon 3, where Nicki and I received our 6th and final Best Fanzine Hugo Award for *Mimosa*. Shortly after the convention ended, we received an email from him that read, "I'm happy we had another chance to get it right." There was never any official explanation as to what had caused the mistake at the Magicon Hugo Ceremony, but if we had been sitting closer to the stage, we might have seen something that would have alerted us that something was amiss – when *Lan's Lantern* was announced as the winner in the Fanzine category, convention chairman Joe Siclari (who knew differently) nearly jumped out of his skin in his haste to get backstage to find out what had happened.

As for the workings of the Great Cosmic Conspiracy, in the end it was George Laskowski who was the victim. Several years later he developed an incurable form of pancreatic cancer and died not long before the 1999 Aussiecon. After that, I have no further cause for complaint.

Before I close this collection, it's back to Australia one more time. As I mentioned, I've been there twice on business since the 1999 Aussiecon; the most recent time was in 2008, which had been a very busy year for me.

To the Antipodes!

Prolog: The View from the Hotel Room Window

As you've probably noticed, I've been traveling a lot this year, much more so than usual. Whenever I do have a business trip, I usually try to stay at a large chain hotel like Marriott, because I value consistency. I know what to expect when I get into the hotel room, and there are usually no surprises. But I usually *don't* know what to expect when I look out the hotel window, and sometimes there *is* a surprise. Such was the case on Sunday morning, September 21st. When I looked down from my 30th floor view, there was a huge mass of runners in a marathon along one of the streets by the waterfront. The line of runners stretched all the way back across one of the most magnificent bridges in the world.



view of Sydney Marathon from my hotel window

It had been a very long trip to get there, but I was in Australia.

36 Views of Bridge and Opera House

In the late 1820s, the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai began a series of woodblock prints that are now collectively known as *36 Views of Mount Fuji*. The most iconic and famous of these is the first of the series, *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*, but the fourth one, *Under Mannan Bridge*, depicts a bridge with much the same curvature as the Sydney Harbour Bridge across a waterway similar in contour to where the Sydney Harbor Bridge is located.



Opera House and Bridge as seen during harbour cruise

If you ask anyone who has never been to Sydney what his or her idea is of the most iconic and famous image of the city, the answer would probably be the Sydney Opera House. But for anyone who's been to the city, you'd probably get a different answer. It's the Bridge. Oh, they are both iconic, no doubt about that, but it's the Bridge that dominates the inner harbour, and it's the Bridge that is the biggest magnet for camera lenses.

The best place for seeing both the Bridge and Opera House is from the middle of the harbour, and the best way to get there is on a harbour cruise. When I

and my co-worker, John, arrived early Saturday morning on the overnight flight from Los Angeles, the very first thing we did, after breakfast at the hotel, was to hurry down to Circular Quay and buy tickets for a sightseeing cruise.

I've counted the photos, and I have a *lot* more than 36 views of the Bridge and Opera House. But it's the Bridge that was the most dominating presence. The cruise went way out to the headlands that separate the harbour from the ocean, and the commentary was so pleasant and amusing that the two hours we spent on the boat went by in a rush. John, who had never been to Australia before, told me that he was glad we did this, as it was a very good way not only to see but also to get a better understanding of the city and its history. And he's right.



harbour cruise boat

You can't just *see* the Bridge, though. There's kind of an unspoken obligation to *experience* it. For the brave of heart (and deep of pocket) you can actually do just that in an extreme way. Almost exactly 10 years prior to this trip, a company named BridgeClimb began offering guided



Sydney skyline and Circular Quay from Bridge pedestrian way

tours of the Bridge along the ladders and catwalks – all the way to the very top of the big arches. It's been very successful – in the ten years of existence, more than two million people have made the climb, including many celebrities and even a 100-year-old woman. But it's not inexpensive – the going rate has escalated up to A\$199.

In the end, John and I decided to be cheapskates and walked across the Bridge's pedestrian way instead. The view of the harbour from there is still spectacular, if perhaps not *quite* so breathtaking.

I Become a Manly Man

During the harbour cruise we had been told that Port Jackson, the official name of Sydney Harbour, is actually a flooded valley. It begins a few miles further inland from Sydney where the Parramatta River broadens out, and extends for about seven miles to the east of Sydney to the two headlands that separate it from the Pacific Ocean.

One of Sydney's more affluent suburbs, Manly, is located not far from the northern headland, and a half-hour ferry ride from Circular Quay gets you there. Manly itself consists mostly of touristy shops and restaurants, all located along the very narrow neck of a peninsula that gradually rises in elevation as it extends southward to the headland. Just a five minute walk takes you from the ferry wharf on the harbour to a mile-long ocean beach. John and I went there on Sunday, our second and last day in Sydney, to enjoy warm spring



at Manly Wharf

weather and see the ocean from an altitude lower than 39,000 feet.



sun worshiper on Manly beach

It was early spring in Australia, but the day we were in Manly it seemed more like midsummer. There were thousands of people on the beach, and it was hot enough that bikini tops were coming off for some of the more determined sunbathers.

For me, though, the real attraction of Manly is the headland, which has been protected from development. It's a long two mile mostly uphill walk to get there, and along the way Manly morphs – you go from a business district through a residential area, past the International College of Tourism and Hotel Management, through the grounds of a former

military base, and finally into the wild heathland of the North Head Sanctuary. It was a real effort to get there, but it's such a special place that I hadn't wanted it to be easy.

The view from North Head is truly wonderful. To the west was the harbour with hundreds of sailboats, while to the east is a 300-foot drop down to the Pacific Ocean. Spectacular, just spectacular.

Manly touts itself as “seven miles from Sydney and a thousand miles from care” and I can see why. It's very easy to pass time slowly there.



the view from North Head

A Different Kind of Map

Sydney was only a weekend stopover for John and me, to give us a chance to recover from the long trip and get acclimated to the 15 hour time differential before going on to a three-day meeting in Canberra. The purpose of the meeting was to update a so-called “technology roadmap” that would help determine the pathway for carbon sequestration from where we are now (mostly research with a few larger



at the Canberra roadmapping meeting

scale demonstration projects here and there) to where we would like to be about 15 years from now (all technologies commercial and in widespread use). The document we were trying to update we had thought, in home repair terms, was the equivalent of a fixer-upper. When we got into it, to our dismay, it became more like a tear-down and rebuild job. The three days we had available turned out to be not nearly enough and most likely there will have to be another get together (though not in Australia) early on in 2009.



Canberra sunset from the rotating restaurant

Geoscience Australia, which hosted the meeting, treated us to a nice dinner on our last night in Canberra in the rotating restaurant in the Telestra tower atop Black Mountain. Great food and pleasant conversation, all at one rev per hour. There is a viewing platform the next level up from the restaurant, from which I tried to see, for the first time, the Magellanic Clouds. But no. The deck was softly illuminated and it was enough to wash out all but the brightest stars. I was able to find the Southern Cross and Alpha Centauri, but that was about it. I think I could probably have done better but I wasn't familiar enough with the southern

skies to know what I was seeing. We had been working for days on a roadmap, but what I really needed then was a different kind of map – a star map.

A Tale of the Great Ocean Road

The business trip didn't end in Canberra. The Otway Basin Project, a medium-scale sequestration demonstration, is underway in southwestern Victoria, and a site visit had been

arranged for us. But to get there was an all-day trip – we had to fly to Melbourne and then drive to Port Campbell, the nearest community of any size to the project site.

This created a problem. Neither John nor I had a valid driving license for Australia, which in retrospect is probably just as well, as we had never driven on the left before and might have been a danger to ourselves and others. Luckily, Nick, who was in charge of the roadmap rewrite, was coming along. And, as he lives in the British midlands, Australian highways were no challenge to him at all.



along the Great Ocean Road

Since we had all day to get there, we decided to travel the Great Ocean Road. It traverses the southern coast of Victoria for what seemed like hundreds of miles, providing some stunning vistas of the Southern Ocean. There are countless places to stop and take it all in (and we did), but the place I found most impressive was Cape Otway. The Cape is one of the southernmost points on the Australian mainland, and to get there you have to drive through one of Australia's national parks where there is a rainforest and (I'm told) a rather impressive waterfall. You emerge onto a coastal bluff where there's ocean on three sides...and a lighthouse.

The Cape Otway Lightstation dates back to 1848 and is the oldest surviving lighthouse on the Australian mainland. It's now part of a complex of buildings that includes an old telegraph station, a WWII-era radar station bunker, and the inevitable souvenir shop. We climbed to the light room at the top of the lighthouse for an even better view and there we had our encounter with the light keeper.

He was no doubt just a somewhat bored national park employee who was filling in as the local historian, but from the way he was talking I thought he might have weathered one too many storms up there. He was good at providing lots of historical minutia, but it was in somewhat random order. And every so often, he would throw in the odd bit of information about himself – how he lived by himself in a little hovel inland a short ways and that it might be possible that he was actually a spaceman. When I heard the last I took a look around to make sure there were no sharp objects nearby. His attention turned to Nick, John and me, and several other wide-eyed looking people who were already there took advantage of the situation to make their escape.

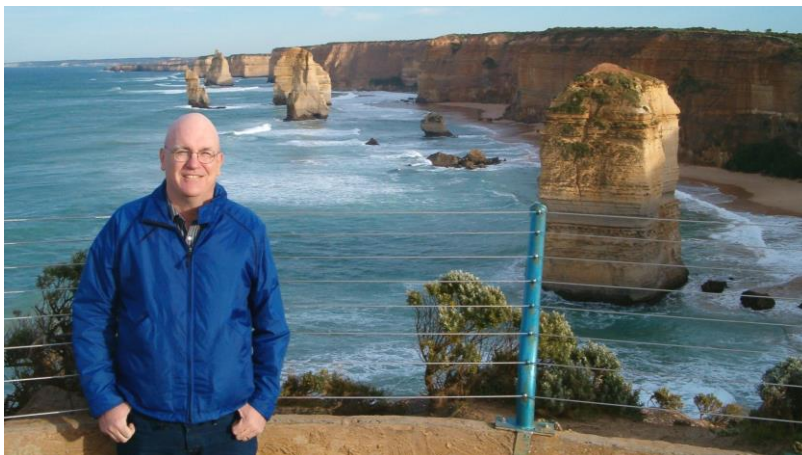


Nick and John at the
Cape Otway Lightstation

Afterwards, when we were back on the road, it was several minutes before any of us said anything. Finally, Nick said what we were all thinking. "He was barking mad!"

Communion with the Apostles

But we were not yet done with the Great Ocean Road. Just before we reached Port Campbell, something about Australia's coastline changed. It might have been the composition of the layered limestone bluffs, or maybe the relative lack of beaches on the west side of Cape Otway, or maybe just an increase in the ferocity of the ocean waves (which were much, much bigger than what we'd seen back in Manly). The result has been, over the millennia, a relatively high rate of coastal erosion which has caused formation of tall islets a few hundred feet offshore. These are quite striking in appearance, and are an international tourist attraction known as "The Twelve Apostles".



at The Twelve Apostles, near Port Campbell



London Arch

There are now fewer than twelve because the relentless attack by the surf has brought some of them down, but just beyond Port Campbell there are even more of these islets in the waters of an inlet known as "The Bay of Martyrs". Not far from there is the most famous of the offshore rock formations, formerly known as "London Bridge". It was in the news back in 1990 when one of the two archways collapsed, stranding two very frightened tourists on the outer section, which had suddenly

transformed into an island, until they could be rescued by helicopter. It's now known as "London Arch".

When I looked at the gap where the archway had fallen, there was no sign of any debris from the collapse. In just a few years, it had been reduced to gravel and completely swept away.

Of Cow Flops and Carbon Dioxide

I had also been swept away, in effect, by a very long day on the road, and by the time we finally reached Port Campbell I was a bit numb. It wasn't just the sensory overload from all we had seen during the trip. I was in the back seat for much of the day and with Nick attacking the rollercoaster roads of the Great Ocean Road as if he were in a Formula One race, I had gotten a near-constant pummeling.

At Port Campbell, we were met by the Otway Project's public liaison representative, Josie, who also (with her husband) owned the motel in Port Campbell where we stayed. Port Campbell

reminded me quite a bit of one of the small touristy towns along the central California coast. There were some shops, restaurants, and a few motels. And not much else. Josie told us that some out-of-town big money developer had bought up land with a waterfront view at the south edge of town for a big hulking ten story hotel. This did not set very well with the townspeople, as you might expect, and not just because it would have looked very out of place with respect to the rest of the town. The developer had made a mistake by not first introducing himself to the townspeople and setting the proper tone for bringing in his investment money (which certainly is going to happen there, sooner or later, given that the town's lifeblood is tourism). As a result, the townspeople presented a united front against him, even after he submitted a revised design, and the hotel project is still on hold.

A different sort of project, and one that is *not* on hold, is located a few miles inland from Port Campbell. Located there, in the middle of a broad stretch of farmland, cow flocks and all, is the Otway Basin Project. It's an intermediate-scale project that is storing bulk quantities of carbon dioxide in a depleted natural gas field in order to learn how the gas will migrate through this type of geologic formation over time and to test ways of monitoring this migration.



Nick, Josie and John at the Otway Basin Project



Peter, the Otway Basin Project operator

The project site itself wasn't all that remarkable. What made the site visit memorable was meeting the project operator, Peter. Peter, in my opinion, is an example of the real Australia. He's originally from the Port Campbell area, but he's been all around Australia and after seeing it all, came back to start a small cattle farm. Peter's farm is where the injection wellhead and project office is located, and it's a good thing it is. He was originally supposed to be mostly, in effect, a caretaker for the project, but there were so many unexpected problems that arose that he's become the lifeline that keeps it running.

We were only supposed to be at the project site for a couple of hours but after we got back to the project office from the site walk-through, some pleasant conversation started and then sandwiches appeared. It wasn't until late afternoon that we finally pointed the car to the quick route back toward Melbourne.

It was time to go home.

Epilog: In Search of Australian Wildlife

Before leaving on this trip I had developed a mental image that we would see literally swarms of Australian wildlife during our travels, but it didn't work out that way. The website that provided a description of Cape Otway, for instance, mentioned that there are koalas in the trees and penguins on the beaches. Didn't see a single one. On the walk from Manly to North Head there is a sign warning of "endangered bandicoots" but if any were there I didn't notice them. There was supposed to be kangaroos at many places along our travel route, but the only time I got a half glimpse of one was in Canberra one evening, when a friend I had met for dinner took me on a drive through one of the more rural areas of the city. And on the one-day stopover in Sydney on the way home, John decided to go on a three hour whale-watching cruise out beyond the headlands. But he told me that all he got to see, besides a couple of dolphins, was several Japanese tourists throwing up over the rail.

Only once did we see any of Australia's iconic marsupials, and it almost caused a traffic accident. On the drive out of Cape Otway, we topped a rise and had to swerve around a stopped car that was blocking half the road while its passengers were surrounding and photographing a lone echidna that had been trying to cross the highway.

The nearest thing to swarms of wildlife we happened across was during our brief stopover in Melbourne after returning from Port Campbell, but it was actually "wild life", not "wildlife". There seemed to be plenty of it on Elizabeth Street, where we went looking for a place to have dinner. There were dozens of restaurants there, each one with a hawker out on the streets giving a very determined come-on to persuade us have dinner there rather than one of the other places. It was the eve of a major annual Melbourne sporting event (the Australian Football Grand Final), so the street was filled with people doing pretty much the same thing as we were. And, to add to the chaos, in the middle of the meal a motorcycle club with dozens of big bikes cruised loudly past our sidewalk table.

On the way back to the hotel John said, "It's too bad we were so rushed coming back from Port Campbell. There were probably other things to see along the way. I guess I need to come back here again someday."

"Me too," I thought. "Me too." ☀



