

## Our trip Down Under

**Tuesday, September 13** - The folks take us to the San Francisco Airport to catch our first leg of the Down Under trip from SFO to LAX. While at SFO we decide to have a burger and beer, 33.25 for two burgers and two beers, we'll be broke or skinny before we get back at this rate. The same night - LAX, Tom Bradley International Terminal, 15.20 for two 10 ounce "pints" of beer. Since TSA took over the airports they must have stock in the airport concessionaires, how do I become a share holder?  
LAX to Melbourne VIC - 15 hours in the air. Quantas has on demand video and lots of them. Slept for about 6 hours off and on, Debbie slept for 6 also.

**Wednesday, September 14** - Missed it. Crossing the International Date Line we went from Tuesday to Thursday.

**Thursday, September 15** - Melbourne Australia. Got in at 8:00am and the weather was clear and 48 degrees. Cleared Customs and got the rental car. Yes, we're braving the drive-yourself world of the wrong side of the car, the wrong side of the street. Our B&B was found easily, you can drive on the tram tracks here, and our hosts Stan and Tony are great. We'll be heading out after showers and directions to shop, drink, eat and hook up with our shooting pards, Pascoe Pete and Saskia's brother and sister in law. They got tickets for us for the second round final of Australian Rules Football, Hawthorn vs Sydney, for Friday night.

[Glendalough Bed and Breakfast](#)  
[Our Room, the Music Room](#)

While at the Victoria Market, the beer store of course, we hooked up with one of the salesmen, Chris, who told us of a great pub called The Drunken Poet. Tried three real pints, the little glasses are called pots. Gonna take a nap then out to a Bistro in an old converted church for dinner.

**Friday, September 16** - Went to the Fire Service Museum, great place with lots of Fire Fighter History.

[1911 Ladder](#) [Steamer](#) [1926 Ladder](#) [Hose Ends and Helmets](#)

Cooks Cottage, taken apart and ship lock, stock and brick to Melbourne from England.  
[Cooks Cottage](#)

Australian Rules Football. Hawthorne vs Sydney - Hawthorne won and play Collingwood next weekend here. Here's what the view from our seats looked like,  
[MCG Left](#) [MCG Right](#)

[Tony and Jean our footy hosts](#)

Tomorrow, on to Ballarat and the Sovereign Hill Gold Fields for my Clamper Brothers.

**Saturday September 17** - Drove 115km to the town of Ballarat. The site of the 1851 gold rush in Australia. The tourist thing here is Sovereign Hill, a town created like the 1850's complete with mine, foundry, shops, constables, redcoats and fun. Lots more to do without rides than Knotts Berry or Disneyland.

[Sovereign Hill](#) [More Sovereign Hill](#)

There is even a place to pan for gold, yes the Humbug panned for gold.

[Gold panning](#) [Gold Rocker](#)

For Captain Ken, XNGH, we visited the 1850's Fire Brigade.

[Hose Trailer](#) [Fire Pumper](#)

Driving home we saw huge flocks of cockatoos in the median strip, pretty cool.

Drove back to Melbourne and went to the Wool Shed Pub at Docklands for a great meal. I had the porterhouse, Debbie had the goat cheese and pasta, both were excellent.

Watching Australia vs Ireland RWC2011 on TV then to bed.

Tomorrow, Debbie found the only antique flea market in Victoria, and it's only open Sunday's.

**Sunday September 18** - Up early to hit the Camberwell Every Sunday Flea Market. Run by the Rotary Club, it's the biggest flea market in Victoria, 370 stalls.

As usual, not twenty steps into the place and Debbie finds stuff. First a red short coat for shooting, then bakelite bracelets, tea and coffee canisters, porcelain figurines and a piece of lumber with coat hooks.

[Debbies Stuff](#) [Close up](#) [Another Close up](#)

While there, we noticed our friend Tres Pinos's people had immigrated to Australia, talk about border crossings.

[Mariachi 1](#) [Mariachi 2](#)

Bought tram tickets for today so I can have a drive break. Going to the Victoria Comedy Theatre to see Rock of Ages today, then dinner, then back to the Drunken Poet.

Folks, if you ever get the chance to see Rock of Ages, GO, you will not be disappointed. Great music, great story, great everything. As good as Beach Blanket Babylon.

Had dinner at the Transit Mall in the City. Five floors of shops, restaurants, movie theatre and the original shot factory complete with shot tower. We're going back tomorrow to take the tour and view the shot tower museum. For those who don't know, lead shot, like that used in shot-guns or weights, was, and still is, dropped from 50 foot towers. This allows gravity to turn the liquid lead into perfect spheres. Neat idea and it works.

Epicurean note - First, they don't have ice tea in Melbourne, if you ask for it they look at you like your speaking pig latin. Second, the beer here sucks. I'm switching to wine until we hit New Zealand and if it's not better there, I'll be a wino 'til we get back.

Tomorrow the City Circle Tram, free, the shot museum and dinner with Jean and Tony our footy hosts. Thai food ummmmm.

G'nite all.

**Monday September 19** - Lots of tram travel today. Melbourne has a great public transportation system. Trams run every where you want to go and one fare gets them all for all day. There is a City Circle tram, free, which circles the city hitting all the spots you want to see as a tourist. We went to the Melbourne Gaol. Famous for 139 hangings including Ned Kelly and 3 women. Interestingly enough, the women were convicted of murder and not a one of them because of domestic violence, unless you call killing children not your own, domestic.

[Gaol](#)

[The cells were this big.](#)

The prisoners were brought in to the first level and left in solitary confinement 23 hours a day. They were allowed 1 hour recreation, by themselves and when out of the cell had to wear a silence mask to keep them from talking. Wouldn't work in the States would it. Once they showed they were trustworthy, they got to move to the second floor.

We also toured the "watchmans" hall. It was where the cops brought folks in for booking up to 1994. There were drunk tanks, cells, padded rooms and separated exercise yards.

[Debbie in the nut room](#)

Then took the tram to the Melbourne Aquarium. Neat place with lots of penguins.

Next stop the Lightning Range Opal Mines and a anniversary gift for Debbie. Learned a lot about Opals, mining, selecting and grading. The owner was an Opal miner back in the day.

[Here's his photo.](#)

Next stop, the main transit mall again, this time for massages. Then on to dinner with our footy hosts. Unfortunately, Tony was down with a bad cold so we took Jean to dinner and Tony had to suffer alone.

Back at the B&B waiting for tomorrow when we head up country again to the Healesville Sanctuary Wildlife Park and the Puffing Billy steam train.

**Tuesday September 20** - Healesville Wildlife Sanctuary. Outstanding wildlife park run by Zoos Australia. [Debbie got to pet a Kangaroo](#). Yes it was raining. We saw two Wombat cubs, just a couple months old. Dang cute. Tasmanian Devil's aren't as ferocious as they are made out to be. There are 40 young born at once and the mom has only four teats so they grow up fighting to survive, only 4 do.

Zoos Australia and all the conservation groups in Australia are on a "Wipe for Wildlife" campaign. It seems 7 million trees are cut down each year just for toilet paper. The push is to use recycled toilet paper. No that doesn't mean used toilet paper, they are using office paper, you know copiers, printers etc, they get made into toilet paper and it saves the habitat for the animals. I, for one, can get on this program, think about it.

[Here I am standing up for "Wipe for Wildlife"](#). We saw duck billed platypus, the animal folks say that after creation God had all these parts left over so he stuck them on one animal, the poor platypus. Birds a wonder everywhere. We ended up the trip at the "Spirit of the Sky" show. Native birds flying in an open setting. Wedge Tail Eagles, Lemon Crested Cockatoo's, Black Breasted Buzzards and Black Tail Fikes. Cool stuff. The last was the Eagle. During the show it started raining. The trainers called "run for the hills" and ended the show as the hail hit.

The trainer headed for the office, the eagle flew back to his cage and we ran for the hills.

Next stop the town of Belgrave and the Puffing Billy steamtrain. Built in 1900 as the main transport for folks from the Dandenong mountains to town, the train was turned over to the Historical Society in 1964. The round trip runs about 4 hours through huge fern trees rain forests, past green pastures and great views.

Heres's the [engine](#) and [boiler](#). All in all a great trip to Melbourne. We'll remember every time we see a steamtrain, kangaroo, miner, opal or toilet paper.

Off tomorrow to Auckland New Zealand and Rugby World Cup 2011.

Ta

***Wednesday September 21*** - Lost day. Up at 3:30am, three hour flight, clear customs, pick up the car, drive to the apartment. The apartment is right on the river and is a one bedroom, one bath, kitchen and living room affair. Nice place, great views and peaceful. Slept well.

***Thursday September 22*** - Had to do laundry today. Laundromat costs 21 bucks for three loads of wash and two dry. Had to do it. Went into downtown Auckland to Sky City. Why? Well, it's got a great revolving restaurant 623 feet up and a 24 hour casino for Debbie. They had England v Georgia on the big screen at the sports book so I had beer and watched the game. The only time I saw Debbie was when she came to get more gambling money.

At the top of the Sky Tower, where the restaurant is, they have sky walking and jumping. Some fools, and I stress fools, pay money to get harnessed up so they can walk around the platform 700 feet above ground outside the building. Other idiots pay to harness up and jump off the building guided by two cables to the ground target. Not for me thank you.

Here's Debbie at the [Sky Tower observation Deck](#) and at [Dinner](#). Tomorrow we're going shopping for sheepskin stuff. Saturday is a day at the horse races and New Zealand vs France at the racecourse big screen TV, well maybe for the first half anyway. Sunday we're at Eden Park to see Samoa vs Fiji. Yahoo, we're in Rugby heaven.

***Friday September 23*** - [The trip to Middle Earth](#) - Many of you probably didn't know but the Lord of the Rings movies were filmed in New Zealand and, after today's trip, [we know why](#). First some of the towns we went through. Papakura, Bombay, Mangatawhiri, Maramania, Mgatea, Netherton, Paeroa, Whangamata, it's enough to make you home sick for Gonzales or Fresno for goodness sake. We went to [Owharoa Falls](#), [Debbie tried to jump](#) in but I stopped her. She [wanted me to go in so...](#) [We both look good here](#). On to Waiiau Falls and a trip on the other world express. [The road just went away](#). [And what's with this sign?](#)

We found [Waiiau Falls](#) and [here](#). On the way back the GPS had us turn down Castle Rock Road. After 100 yards we decided GPS was stupid and turned around. It was a jeep road and not a Holden four door sedan road.

After getting back on track we get stopped by wildlife in the road, a bunch of [wild pigs](#) called Cooks, after Captain Cook who left them here in 1632. There is also an island off the coast where he left a bunch of goats for his return to New Zealand, it's now called Goat Island. Earlier Debbie saw this [HUGE chicken](#). It was a Buff Orpington and was as tall as a great dane. She wouldn't stop talking about how big it was.

On the way back to Auckland we stopped at a Pack and Save to pick up the fixins for Tacos.

If you're ever in New Zealand and are looking for taco shells or tortillas, don't despair, they're in the pasta aisle, huh? So we try and get some grated cheddar and surprise, surprise. New Zealand has no orange cheese so we end up with coarse grate white cheddar.

Back home and Debbie is making tacos while I do this blog. Oh yeah, total trip 512km or 312miles. Not bad on a rental car.

Tomorrow the horse races, a run by Eden Park to look over Sunday's destination and New Zealand vs France.

Night all.

**Saturday September 24** - A day at the Races. We'll we spent most of the day at the [Ellerslie Racecourse](#) for seven races. Debbie hit the pay window on three [I only got one](#) (note the B40 Fire Department shirt). Still it was a fun day. Tonight we're watching New Zealand vs France on Maori TV. Go the All Blacks. Tomorrow we go to Samoa vs Fiji at Eden Park.

**Sunday September 25** - Eden Park, the Mecca for Southern Hemisphere Rugby. I've always heard Eden Park but I've never had a chance to see it. Now I can say I have. [What a venue](#). [Great seats](#), under [cover was nice](#) because of the early rain. Samoa vs Fiji. In the South Pacific, tribes and countries used to go to war to establish dominance, today it's settled with a rugby match. Does that make it any less brutal and bone crushing? Nope. The medical staff were well used in today's match. Samoa ended up beating Fiji 37-7 to advance to the quarter finals. Both teams did a Hakka but unlike the All Black Hakka, both teams did it at the same time. The Hakka is a war chant/challenge to the opposite tribe/country/team to try and intimidate them. It was great. We got to hear the Samoan National Anthem up close as a supporter behind us had a great voice. [Here he is](#). The rain cleared just before kickoff and the match/weather/venue/time was excellent. I'm very happy. By the way, don't order the [Kiwi Dog](#) thinking it's a euphemism for Hot Dog.

Tomorrow we're going souvenir shopping then pack for our Tuesday morning flight to Brisbane Australia. Night all.

**Monday September 26** - Our last day in New Zealand and it's off souvenir shopping and to the casino to loose the rest of the Kiwi money. We realized we hadn't gotten any pictures of our place here. Riverside Retreat is a granny flat on the back of this couples home. Andy and Annemarie are great hosts and invited us to see Australia vs USA at their place as they had satellite. Andy's a K-8 principal and Annemarie works the CT Scan at the hospital. CT Scans are privately run so she's not part of the hospital staff but a contractor working there.

Here's a couple of pictures from our place. [Down Stream](#) and [Up Stream](#).

As for loosing money at the casino well, I went on the souvenir trek and that darn Debbie can't seem to do a thing I ask. Not only didn't she loose the last of the Kiwi money, she won 110 bucks. Well we spent it at dinner at the Wellington Restaurant on Panmure Basin. Great food and mostly free after Debbie's casino heist.

Tomorrow will be a lost day as we fly to Melbourne, clear customs, fly to Brisbane and drive 4 hours north to Bundaberg, the home of Bundaberg Rum. Ummmmmm rum tasting.

More tomorrow night.

**Tuesday September 27** - Yep, lost day. We got into Melbourne 20 minutes early and guess what? They didn't have a gate for us to go to. So, we had to taxi to an empty place on the runway and wait for buses to come pick us up and transfer to the airport, where we had to clear immigration, collect our luggage and clear customs then head to domestic departures and drop off our luggage, clear security again and find the gate, all within 2 hours. We made it and so did our luggage. The trip to Bundaberg is 4 hours driving north east of Brisbane. Look on the map about 450km north east and you'll find us. Lots of sugar cane fields which is why Bundaberg rum is made here. Tomorrow a look see at the air port for our Great Barrier Reef excursion on Thursday, laundry (yes it needs to be done) and rest. Debbie is coming down with sinus stuff and is feeling bad. A little rum and she'll be right as rain.

**Wednesday September 28** - [Here's a picture of our B&B](#). We're at an internet café, 2 bucks for a half hour, not bad. Went to the Bundaberg Rum Distillery for the tour and tasting. Yes, every [Redshirts dream](#), rum tasting. 96% of the rum is consumed by Australians, 3% goes to New Zealand and the other 1% goes world wide. Great rum and even more ideas for the brewery. Steve, get your brewing hat on, we're making rum.

Then we went to the [Ginger Beer brewery](#) for the tour and tasting. Yep more tasting. Ginger beer once was 11% abv now, since kids drink it, it's only .5%. We can do better, Steve, get your brewing hat on, we're making ginger beer the way it should be. Yes, that's an Aussie Six Pack I'm holding in the picture.

Tomorrow it's off early for our flight to Lady Elliot Island and our Great Barrier Reef tour. Glass bottom boat, snorkeling and fun. Friday's a free day so we'll plan that tomorrow. Later all.

**Thursday September 29** - A bit of weather has blown in but not enough to stop our trip to Lady Elliot Island at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef. The plane was an eight seater, dual prop job. Kind of neat to watch the pilot and great views from all windows. Here's a picture from the plane of [Lady Elliot Island](#). The west end of the island was closed because of the storm surge but the lagoon and it's glass bottom boats was open. Here's a [picture of a blue starfish](#). Here's [Debbie getting wet](#), as usual. The western end also had a [lighthouse](#) as this is a reef atoll and is hazardous for boaters.

Tonight a seafood dinner and rest. Tomorrow we're exploring Bundaberg some more. Saw a greyhound track from the air and are going to check it out.

**Friday September 30** - On the list today is a visit to the [Cooperage](#). That's where barrels are made. The company was the one who made the 6000gallon rum maturation vats for the Bundaberg Distillery. I never knew how much went into making barrels and casks. Guess I'll have to give it a try sometime. Then onto an industrial safety store to by a pair of Mongrel work boots. We met a guy at the airport yesterday who had worn his everyday for a year doing repair work on fishing boats. Welding, grinding, woodwork and in salt water. They're that good. Next to the Botanical Gardens where we rode an old [diesel train](#) and saw some neat trees. Also saw [goannas](#), [turtles](#) and [eels](#), all fresh water. Some really pretty blue birds called [pukekeko](#). Back at the B&B to pack for the trip tomorrow back to Brisbane and the AFL finals. Then Sunday to Australia Zoo, the home base of the late lamented Crocodile Hunter, danger danger. Then the NRL finals. Great timing for all the national sports finals here.

**Saturday September 30** - Another lost day. Drove 4 and a half hours from Bundaberg to Brisbane. Since we got here before our 1:00pm check in, we had to kill a couple of hours. So, Debbie got one of her wishes. We found a cricket match to watch. Damn strange game that. According to Hoyle, there are at least 2 dozen fielding positions and only 11 players. There are only 2 innings and the object is for the team in the field to put 10 of the other team out. How that's done is a mystery to me. After ten batters are out then the other team comes up. Some matches last five days before 2 innings are done. Like I said, damn strange game. At noon the teams take a break for lunch and in the afternoon, tea. We got to the cottage, a little three bedroom 1.5 bath place with a great view, and watched Geelong vs Collingwood for the Australian Rules Football Grand Finale. Poor Collingwood. It looked like the 49ers. The first quarter they were on fire then just pooped out. Sunday we're going to Lone Pine Preserve with over 130 Koalas, Debbie is going to be able to cuddle all she wants. There will be lots of pictures from that trip. Sunday is also the last day of School holiday, 3 weeks, so Monday at Australia Zoo looks like the thing to do. Three more nights and I get to sleep in my own bed. My hips and shoulders are killing me. I was hoping for better beer last night at the Italian restaurant as it's brewed especially for them, nope, it sucked and Debbie's Fettuccini was bland. It's back to wine and fish and chips.

**Sunday October 1** - A great trip to Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary. I was here in 1982 while on tour with the San Jose Seahawks Rugby Club. The place has gotten bigger and better. Lone Pine opened it's doors in 1927 and now has the most koalas in captivity. They breed, rescue and release more koalas than any other organization in Australia. [Here's Debbie holding a koala.](#) [And Wayne also.](#) While there, we hooked up with our [new nephew](#). He's closely related on Wayne's side of the family. Also ran into relatives from the [Hall](#) and [Mahrt](#) side of Debbie's families. Here's a cute shot of a [mum and her baby](#). Debbie got a great scare when we walked into the place. She was looking at the animals and kick/step/hoped over a two foot lizard. Almost stopped her heart. Lots of neat pictures to share when we get back. Nap time now then the National Rugby League Finals, Manly vs NZ Warriors. Go Warriors. Drat, Warriors lost. At halftime we ordered Dominos pizza. I'm here to say, Dominos pizza in Australia tastes like crap, just like in the US. Tomorrow Australia Zoo by Crikey.

**Monday October 2** - Two load of laundry hanging on the line outback and we're off to Australia Zoo. Just so you don't think we forgot to take pictures of our place in Brisbane, [here you go](#). Australia Zoo is just 100km North of us and opposite Brisbane traffic. Easy to get to and some beautiful mountains, the Glass House Mountains, along the way. While at Australia Zoo, I got a photo of the [stunt double](#) Reese Witherspoon used in Water for Elephants. Great likeness I think. We also got to see a [Wombat](#) up close, I even got to pet his nose.

So many animals to see and lots of action photos for home.

Tomorrow it's off to the Treasury Casino so Debbie can get rid of our last Australian money. Like that's going to happen. Every time she tries to loose, she doubles our money. Well, she does like trying. I'll be at the sports bar watching rugby, horse racing and trying to find a decent beer in this country.

***Tuesday September 4*** - Spent the morning packing and now we're off to the [Treasury Casino and Hotel](#). The old Brisbane Treasury building was converted into a cool casino and hotel. The exterior stayed the same and the interior was converted. Although the little off rooms, offices and store rooms were maintained as game machine rooms and bars. The main floor is all the board games. Of course Debbie couldn't loose the last of the Australian money so we'll have to go out for dinner again. Tomorrow we'll be leaving Australia heading to LA then to SFO. We leave Brisbane at 11:00am Wednesday and get into SFO at 11:00am Wednesday. International Date Line and all that. Debbie's folks are picking us up and Debbie will drive home as I'm still on the wrong side of the road.  
See you in the good old USA.