

March 2 to 11

Australia

March 2 Wellington to Sydney

My sleep was disrupted by my phone making noises at both 01.00 and 01.05. This meant that my slumbers were disturbed for the rest of the night and I was wide awake at 04.30.



I waited in the warm and the dark

I stood outside on a warm still morning, the taxi arrived five minutes early and I was at the airport and through security about half an hour after leaving the house. I used my free pass for the lounge and had a light breakfast.

The plane took off on time, landed slightly early and my seat was uncomfortable. 'Nuff said.

Sydney Airport was efficient, about thirty minutes from touch down to clearing customs. I spent some time buying an Opal Card (the Sydney travel card) and then finding out where the hotel was in relation to Central Station.

The train was at the end of rush hour and was packed. Not ideal for people with bags. Once at Central Station, I found a cab which, because of the one way systems, took a relatively long time to travel a relatively short distance. As I discovered later, I could almost have walked it in the same time.

The hotel looked seedy on the outside, definitely an old pub, but the inside had been well renovated and the staff were friendly and helpful. I stowed my bag in the storage area - far too early to have my room - changed into shorts in the Gents and walked fifty metres round the corner to a café for a long black. It was OK but not up to New Zealand standards.



The Vulcan Hotel

The food looked excellent but I mustn't have anything until lunchtime. I realised while I was drinking my coffee that I had company sitting by my shoulder.



I had company ...

The weather clouded over and it became increasingly humid. Having left my waterproof in the hotel, I was apprehensive.



The UTS Business School

The route into the city took me along The Goods Line, a pedestrian way which passes through lots of bits of University, including the architecturally amazing Business School.



Anyone for tennis?

It led me to George Street and a large branch of HSBC. The nice lady there was very helpful but made me realise that buying Chinese currency in Australia would be a very expensive business. I had better do more research when I am back in New Zealand.



HSBC - Australian style

The World Square shopping centre has a large supermarket, where I bought muesli for breakfasts, and an electrical shop where, once again, I failed to find useful information on Chinese electrical plugs.

Pitt Street, the main shopping area, failed to provide a bookshop and the harbour end of George Street seemed to be non-stop road works, part of the new light rail system as it turned out.

There is an Information Centre on The Rocks, which directed me to Dymocks, half way back down George Street. The market, which I remembered to sell good food on my last visit, now seemed to be restricted to bric a brac but I was pleased to see that The Observer, my favourite Sydney pub, was open once again. It did look cleaner, not always an improvement, and I will have to pay a visit before I depart.

The harbour was dominated by the Diamond Princess, a huge cruise ship, which dwarfed everything and almost obliterated the views of the Opera House. Surrounding the Overseas Passenger Terminal were huge queues, presumably people wanting to get on or off. As I was about to leave Circular Quay, I had knocked a setting on the camera so that lots of photos were almost black. I may or may not be able to recover them.



The best that I could manage

I took a couple more, mainly to capture the cruise ship and the man apparently levitating. I'm sure he wasn't but I've no idea how he was doing it.



Very clever



Central Station

The train took me back to Central, where I asked at the ticket office about tickets to Wollongong. The lady said a ticket, using my Opal card, would cost \$6. I queried this as it seemed ludicrously cheap for a 90 minute journey but she assured me that it really was that cheap. Amazing. I will wait to see what it does cost on Monday.



Central Station

I then asked at the station Tourist Office about major sporting events in the city over the weekend. There appeared to be the choice of Aussie Rules or the Mardi Gras festival.

After a few false starts I located the direct route from the station to the hotel and bought a carton of VERY expensive milk from a dairy.



Café for lunch

The café where I had coffee this morning sold me a roast vegetable sandwich. The bread was rye or similar, so very healthy. Unfortunately, it seemed to be sultana bread, so not so healthy. The vegetables, however, probably made up for it.



Healthy looking sandwich

I claimed my room - one floor above the lift - but very well appointed. I had a rest - getting up at 04.30 isn't good for me - and prepared for the rest of the day.



A very smart room

I left at about 15.30, weighed down with a bag full of DVDs. Because of this, photography was limited.

I walked slowly to Central Station, following what I thought was the direct route. and caught a train to Wynyard, only a couple of stops. There, I walked the short distance to the NRMA motor insurance offices. They make very good road maps or they used to. As a result of their new policy, my visit was fruitless. I will have to visit some more bookshops tomorrow.

I arrived at Circular Quay to find that the cruise liner had sailed and that the Manly Ferry was about to. I changed plans and caught the fast (expensive) ferry, instead.



We passed the Opera house ...

We sailed across the harbour at speed, overtaking the normal ferry and the cruise liner in the process. I took lots of photos of the obvious things, the bridge, the Opera House, the other boats and so on. The weather was pretty good.



... and an interesting old boat ...

We reached Manly in bright sunshine. The waterfront bars were packed. I walked along the Corsa, the street which links the two beaches. Ocean Beach, one of the best in Sydney, was full. Not a surprise given the weather.



We passed the ferry ...



... before overtaking the cruise ship



Manly hove into view



Pretty canoes alongside



The Corso

I retraced my steps and met Angie at the Ivanhoe Hotel. We ate well, my steak was particularly good, and I drank more than was good for me. The main thing was that I handed over the large bag of DVDs. My baggage will be much lighter from here on.



An excellent steak



Fine decorations on some of the buildings

I caught the fast ferry back again, taking more photos. The evening light was interesting and it was still warm.



The Harbour looked good ...



Manly Ocean Beach



... in the twilight

I caught the train to Central but got lost between there and the hotel, the walk thus taking twice as long as it should have done.



The Ivanhoe

I wrote my diary and drank coffee in my room.

March 3 Sydney

Breakfast in my room was easy, my expensive muesli was OK and not sweet and the coffee, imported from New Zealand was good. I used the time to process three (or four) days worth of photos so that I was just about up to date.

A little after 09.00 I walked outside into bright sunshine and found yet another route to Central Station. I asked about the times of trains to Wollongong and sympathised with the elderly Chinese lady and the lady at the information counter who were completely unable to understand each other. Even obtaining the assistance of a young lady of oriental appearance failed to solve the problem. I could be in the same position when I reach Shanghai in three weeks.

I left the station, walked the wrong way up George Street for a couple of minutes, then realised my mistake and retraced my steps.



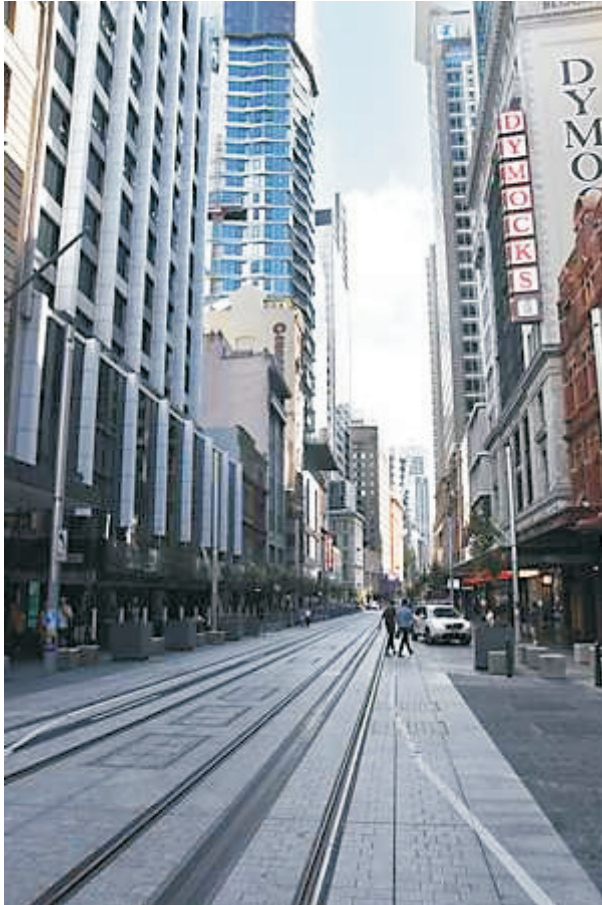
A very green building

I did spot a remarkably green building. Whether there was a technical reason or just someone trying to prove a point, I do not know.



Chaos on George Street

George Street, as I have already said, is non-stop road works. I hope the light rail works don't take as long as they did in Edinburgh.



It will look good when it's finished

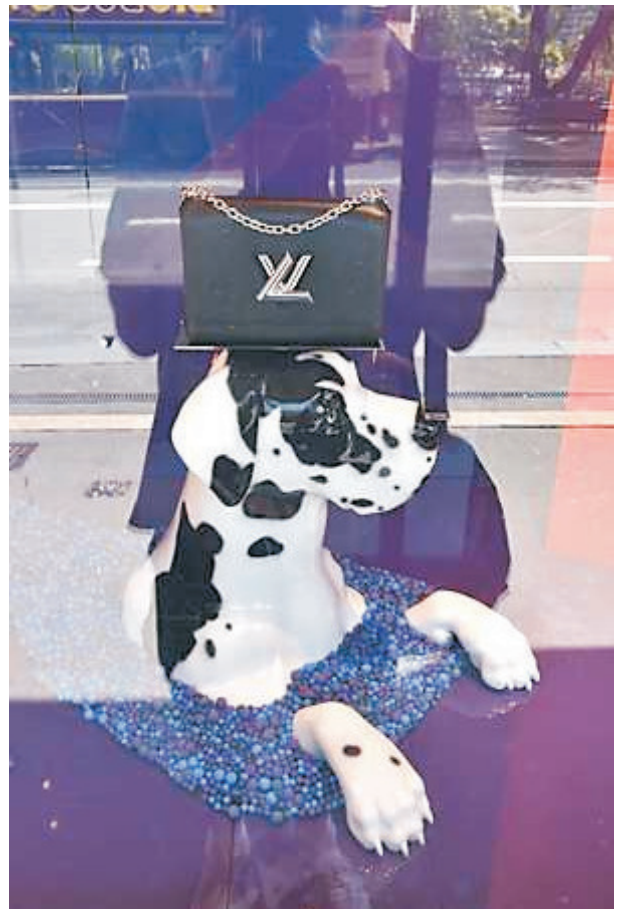
I found Dymocks and bought just the map that I wanted. The building is old and magnificent but almost impossible to photograph. This also applied to the arcade next door and many others which I studied along the way. The war memorial was new to me but might have been there for years. I finally reached The Rocks, which must be a couple of miles from Central Station, and had a very good coffee in the rear garden of one of the cafes.



Dymocks



Australian Regiment Memorial



An interesting window display



The Strand Arcade



The coffee made it all worthwhile



It seemed to fill the harbour

Yesterday, I encountered a huge cruise ship filling the harbour and obstructing the view. This left in the afternoon and we passed it on the Manly Ferry. When I reached the Overseas Passenger Terminal, I saw that it had been replaced by one that appeared to be equally large. I took similar photos to the ones yesterday, this time with the camera set properly, I hope!



Costa Luminosa

There used to be a line of fish and seafood restaurants along the harbour in some historic warehouses. The whole area is being refurbished meaning that the restaurants, if they do reopen, will be completely unaffordable.



These used to be good restaurants

I took more photos then entered the Observer. This has been cleaned up and no longer has the slightly unkempt air that made it so attractive. I think the new owners are Asian and they are trying to appeal to the cruise ship passengers.



A fine old pub - or used to be

The food and beer were both fine and there was even the England v New Zealand ODI on TV. The atmosphere had gone, however. There used to be a real buzz from the locals crowded around the bar. I'm sure it will be profitable but not through me. It's now a café that sells beer.



Food with a little beer



The CBD

With the sun still beating down, I decided to have a boat trip. The ferry round the harbour to Pyrmont seemed like a good idea so I found a seat at the back and waited to depart.



The ferry to Darling Harbour



Under the bridge walkers



We crossed the main harbour



Barangaroo - big buildings & lots of cranes

We crossed the harbour, under the bridge, to Milsons Point and Luna Park, then back again, past Barangaroo with its massive new developments, and into Darling Harbour. I disembarked and found myself near the Welcome Wall, a massive list of immigrants. I enquired in the Maritime Museum and they searched their database and found a Serjeantson. This turned out to be my cousin Robert, who I met in 1986 but who died a few years later. I planned to visit the Museum tomorrow if the forecast drizzle appears.



The Immigrants Wall



The bridge had come apart

As I approached Pymont Bridge, I realised that it was in mid swing. I've no idea why they opened it but I tried to grab a photo. The flags which line it commemorating the Chinese New Year were fluttering in the gentle breeze.



The flags were fluttering

At the far end of the bridge was a reminder of times past. When I was last here, there was an elevated monorail running round the city centre and crossing the bridge. This has been demolished but they have left a piece of it in situ. The cafes and bars were doing a roaring trade on a hot Saturday afternoon. I was good and passed by without stopping at any of them.



Part of the old monorail



Blue sky, blue harbour



A good place for a crane company

Here, as everywhere else in this city, there is a huge amount of construction work in progress. Cranes everywhere.



It's the Year of the Dog

Strung along the harbour were lots of pretty flags which, closer inspection revealed, were all of dogs, part of the Year of the Dog celebrations. Chinese influence is considerable in these parts.



Back on the Goods Line

I found myself back on the Goods Line so I followed it to the end of the road on which the hotel stands. I did think of having a cold drink at the café but it is closed at weekends.

When I worked in Sydney, over twenty years ago, I remember visiting the Australian Youth. This old style pub is a few minutes walk from the hotel so I entered, booked a table and had a cold beer. The place didn't seem to have changed much. That's good news.

Back at the hotel, I had a long rest. Six and a half hours on my feet had worn me out.



The Australian Youth

Just before 18.30 I crossed the road to the pub, which was an old style basic pub but with a classy restaurant and excellent service. I ate very well. Ham hock salad with lots of green stuff and a pickled egg. There were also a few pork scratchings but, unlike the rest, these were terrible. I felt obliged to complain to the maitre d', a very pretty lady with an Irish accent. We had an entertaining chat.



Grilled Trevalla

The main course was grilled trevalla with lots of vegetables and no potatoes. Just what the Doctor ordered, which couldn't be said about the two glasses of Clare Valley Riesling.

I waddled home feeling full and played with my photos.

March 4 Sydney

The cloud had definitely replaced the sun when I left the hotel at about 09.30, following my breakfast of muesli. Seeking another route to Central Station, I walked along Wattle Street and straight into a Police Breath Testing Stop.



They didn't test me

They weren't testing pedestrians so I passed by and took a surreptitious photo from the rear. I assume they were looking for drivers still drunk from last night's Mardi Gras celebrations.



Another Chinese doggie

The pub on the corner was dead, just like so many in the UK, so I walked up Broadway. This was enlivened by more of the dog flags. Very clever.



A long way from Kent

There was also a strange Kentish arch and the green building I had spotted yesterday. This seemed to be a shopping mall which not only had plants growing out of the walls but also what appeared to be solar panels hanging overhead.



Solar panels in the sky



Ferns on the walls

I located the Goods Line and also an information board offering more information about it. It really was a goods line, running from Redfern to Darling Harbour. There were even some old signal levers to prove it.



It must be an old railway line



It also acts as a recreation spot

The line runs into the Powerhouse museum, my destination for the morning. The oldish chap at the desk said I could get in cheap as a pensioner and we discussed how he was retiring in two months and heading to a narrow boat in Warwickshire. It is a small world.

The museum was excellent. Full of stuff from the world of design, science and technology. There was a great film on a new technique for sewage treatment.



The Powerhouse Museum

I was enthralled by the section on shops, which featured the English immigrant from a reasonably wealthy shop owning family who eloped with a Chinese immigrant and, between them, ran a shop in rural NSW for many years. Much of the contents of the shop had been acquired by the museum and it was all explained in an interview with one of their grandchildren.



The Mongolian communal hut

There was a display of a communal "hut" developed for use in Mongolian cities where there are no public spaces. It is hoped that these simple structures will improve social integration. Some ideas are very simple but may have profound effects.



Interesting art and design



Part of the Whitbread Brewery

There was also a huge collection of industrial stuff. The Boulton & Watt steam engine was retired from the Whitbread Brewery in London and shipped to Sydney in 1887 or 1888 to save it from destruction. It has recently been restored to full working order.

The Catalina hanging from the ceiling was almost impossible to photograph and there were several trains. The old indicator board from Central Station was splendid.



Railways of the past

A study of the photos will reveal lots of things that I have forgotten but I spent two happy hours there.

The café was both busy and full so I left the building and ventured into an increasingly busy day.



Over the light rail line ...

My route took me over the light rail line, through Paddy's Markets - source of all things tatt - and into Chinatown. The entrance was marked by two fine dogs.



... and into Paddy's Market



Very big guard dogs

I eventually arrived at Darling Harbour which has a lot of posh café bars and a few cheap takeaways. Doyles is one of Sydney's most famous restaurants, situated on a bay in the harbour, but it has also franchised some fish and chip shops. The fish and Greek salad were Ok but I only ate about a third of the chips.



The food was OK ...



... but Doyles other place is smarter



They welcome everyone here



An unusual look into containers

I passed through the busy restaurant area and reached the National Maritime Museum. Outside is a special exhibition of shipping containers describing their invention and the ways in which they have influenced trade, employment and lifestyle. Very interesting.

The main Museum is OK but nothing like as exciting as the Powerhouse. The engine from the harbour ferry converted to wartime duties was fun, as was the old lighthouse light. The feature on aboriginal water rights was thought provoking but photography was permitted.

There was a tear jerking display on the Australian soldiers who married Japanese girls after the war and had to wait four years to get them back to Australia. This couple were married for 62 years. What a story!



A tear jerking story

Feeling the need for coffee, I examined loads of places which didn't look suitable before "selecting" the last one I encountered. It was OK but when I started writing this I hadn't received the bill. The weather was still cooling, the breeze was still blowing and I kept feeling slight touches of moisture in the air.



The old lighthouse



Almost like Kowloon or Singapore

The bill turned out to be \$4.40, quite good by Sydney standards. I walked the short distance to the Chinese Garden of Friendship, paid my gold coin fee and entered. It is similar to others that I have visited and the proximity to tower blocks reminded me of the gardens I have visited in Kowloon.



The Chinese Garden of Friendship

There were lots of people around but it was still a relatively tranquil place. The fish were huge, the dragons were unexpected and there was water everywhere. There were even ladies in ethnic costume. I have no idea if they were official or just having fun.



Unexpected dragons



Unexpected local dress



Strange things hiding in the undergrowth

There were tiny statues of the animals in the Chinese calendar hiding in the undergrowth, with small plaques explaining them close by.



Beautiful carvings

I returned to the hotel the way I had come, consulted the lady at reception about restaurants and had a rest.

My plan had been to go a few minutes up the road to a German restaurant. The WWW swore that it would be open. It wasn't. Almost all of the other local restaurants are South East Asian, a cuisine that I love but not when I am about to visit Shanghai and Hong Kong.

The only option was to visit the Australian Youth again. The same very pretty maitre d' welcomed me and we had a long chat about food and wine.



Baby squid

The Canberra Chardonnay was good. A lovely nose and a long finish. The baby squid with harissa was amazing.

After a discussion I ordered a Shiraz/Grenache. This was very good, full bodied and with a long finish.

The wagyu skirt was brilliant, as were the crunchy green beans. What a meal. In retrospect, it might rate as the best I ate on the whole trip. I continued my chat with the maitre d' and then walked home to bed.



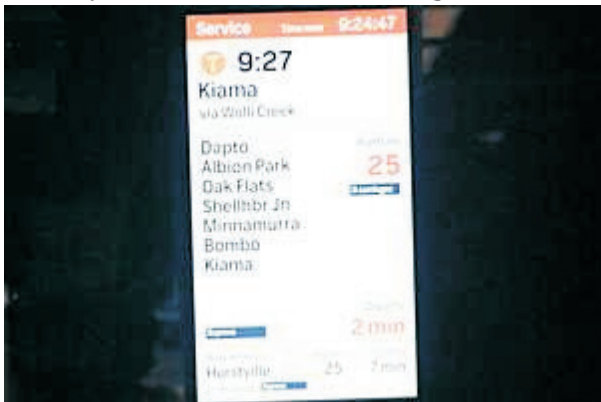
Amazing skirt

March 5 Sydney to Mollymook

I woke far too early and with a funny throat. I hope I'm not sickening for something.

I packed, breakfasted and checked the room several times. Happy that I hadn't forgotten anything, I checked out and started the walk to the station.

This took just over fifteen minutes, only a few more than usual. It was humid and I seemed to be the only person walking towards the station. Everyone else was walking towards the city and either work or college.



The sign said I was in the right place

I went underground to Platform 25 and waited. The indicator board said I was in the right place and, now being able to out down my bags, I was able to attempt a photo of the train as it arrived.



I think this was my train

It was one of the normal double decker underground trains but without too many people aboard. I tried a few photos through the windows without much success.

We passed through the south of Sydney, then an area of forest and finally to some views of the sea. It was misty and there were large puddles on the station platforms.



Through the Sydney suburbs



Past some strange industrial buildings

At North Wollongong, after 90 minutes of slow progress (like every Australian train I have been on), there was a huge exodus of young people. All off to the university, I suppose.

Five minutes later, we pulled into Wollongong, I got off, tagged off my Opal card - only \$5.95 deducted for a 90 minute journey - and crossed the road to a waiting taxi.

It wasn't a long trip to the Avis Office but, with my bags, it would have taken at least twenty minutes to walk.



Not an inspiring route to the city

They were expecting me and I abandoned my bags in the back of the office. I hope they are still there when I return.



Dull day. Dull city

The ten minute walk back into the city centre is not aesthetically pleasing. The centre, itself, is OK but not exciting. I bought some throat sweets, picked up a map at the tourist office and had a mediocre coffee sitting outside a fun looking café.



Fun surroundings. Mediocre coffee

I continued down the street, past the old town hall and the Roman Catholic Cathedral. The stadium, home to the Illawarra Steelers, now the Dragons, came as a bit of a surprise as it is almost on the beach.



Big stadium for a small city



Past the Cathedral ...



... and down to the beach



Lovely sand. Shame about the steelworks

The sand was a lovely colour but the Port Kembla steelworks rather overshadowed everything to the South. The waves sounded good but the dull weather wasn't really conducive to paddling.

On the way to the beach I had spotted the museum. Quite a fine building but, of course, closed on Mondays and also on every day except Wednesdays and weekends.



Lots of people want to live here

There were some huge blocks of flats. Presumably they are waterfront pads for people who can't afford them in Sydney. I can't believe that anyone braves the trains and commutes there.



Interesting lunch

A posh deli/café attracted my attention. It was busy though and offered interesting sounding sandwiches. My cheese, salami and rocket on rye was, of course, toasted. They hate raw sandwiches in this country. It tasted good, however, and had some healthy stuff to accompany it.



There was some interesting artwork

I stopped at a supermarket to buy some bits, including some paracetamol, then returned to the Avis Office to collect a car. This turned out to be a medium sized SUV, larger than I really wanted but smaller than the Holden Commodore that they tried to give me.

I set off South along a motorway so there was no stopping for photography. By the time I was able to stop, the rain had started. It continued until I had reached my destination. I did manage one sea view but got wet in the process.



Not much of a view

The motel in Mollymook was on the edge town, right on the main state highway. It was old but clean and it should be fine. I immediately organised a taxi to take me to the restaurant for dinner.

I ventured into Mollymook, looked at the harbour in the rain, and took some photographs.



The harbour looked good



The beach was pretty enough



But the weather was foul

The supermarket sold me some bits and pieces and I then returned to the motel to prepare for the evening's entertainment.

The taxi collected me and drove me through the murk to Rick Stein's restaurant. The views would be wonderful if the rain and mist weren't there. This being a posh place and full of diners, I refrained from taking photos. The service was excellent in a laid back, Australian, sort of way. Very professional. The wine list was interesting. The food was OK but far from brilliant. I have to say that it was a bit of a disappointment. The Mexican style crab crumble tasted very good but seemed to contain remarkably little crab. The seared tuna was cooked through - a complete no no. The vegetables which accompanied it, however, were to die for. All in all, it wasn't worth the money but I had to give it a go.

I summoned a taxi home again and did my usual evening chores.

March 6 Mollymook to Lakes Entrance



A slight improvement in the weather

By the morning, the weather had improved but my throat hadn't. I breakfasted, packed and set off just after 08.00 and a few minutes later than planned.



Bateman's Bay

With 500 kilometres to cover in the day, stops would inevitably be limited. After 45 minutes, I stopped briefly at Bateman's Bay, which had a large bridge, blue skies and pelicans. All very pretty.



Pelicans

The road was like many others that I have driven in Australia. Undulating, with trees interspersed with clearings and small settlements, and road works - lots of them - which slowed my progress considerably.



The Bodalla Cheese Factory

After another 45 minutes, I saw the signs to the Bodalla Cheese Factory and felt obliged to stop and buy some. (It turned out to be OK but not really exciting.) The temperature had dropped considerably and it was starting to drizzle. This continued for another hour and my progress was slow.



Not very exciting trees



Eden Wharf

The half way point on the journey was Eden, a fishing port. I was half an hour behind my schedule so I drove straight to the wharf.



Big fish



Were they trying to catch it or feed it?

There were lots of fishing boats and a couple of guys feeding fish heads to some large rays. Whether they were conservationists or just wanted skate for tea, I'm not sure.

A café on the wharf gave me a very good Thai Calamari salad. Local squid with lots of herbs, salad and spices.

The drive South 333 went a bit faster. Fewer road works and very light traffic. The scenery was much as before with lots of trees and occasional cleared areas.



Lakes Entrance

Once over the border into Victoria, the road seemed to deteriorate a bit - not an uncommon assessment of Victorian roads. The weather, however, continued to improve. Once I had reached Lakes Entrance, 250 kilometres non-stop, I was on schedule and it was glorious.



An "unusual" motel

The holiday cottages were dated and a half kilometre out of the town but, at about £60, cheap by Australian standards. I unpacked a bit, put the perishables in the fridge and marched into town.



One road into town

There is really only one road. It is definitely a resort but not one with lots of restaurants. I photographed the footbridge and then found a café for coffee.



Lakes Entrance

The coffee was good and the barista advised me on good sources of fish in the town. The two floating restaurants, one selling fish & the other fusion Chinese, were both good but were at the far end of the town from my cottage. Miriams, which I had already walked past, was thought to be quite good so I decided on that.



A good place ...



... to eat fish

I walked as far as the Floating Dragon, about two kilometres in all. I have walked that far for dinner but decided against it today.

There were fishing boats of all shapes and sizes tied up. This ought to be a good place to eat fresh fish.



Unusual memorials - without flash

Alongside the path were several carved wooden war memorials. These were unusual and a nice idea. The bright sunlight made them difficult to photograph so I tried both with and without fill in flash. I will decide which works best later on.



A walk back along the beach

I returned to my cottage, watched the news on TV and set off back into town. I reached the restaurant after just under fifteen minutes, climbed the stairs and ordered the full seafood platter. It may be greedy but fish is good for me. That's just as well that I have miscounted my diabetes pills and will have to reduce my dose from four to three a day until I return to New Zealand. I'm sure it won't kill me.



Miriam's



Lovely view from the window

There were several local wines on the list, mainly from Wyanga, just up the road. I ordered a Riesling, which was OK but not really good. I've never heard of wine in this area. Perhaps that's why!



A large fish platter ...

The seafood platter was huge but I managed to eat most of it. Fish, prawns, crab, squid, octopus, oysters, mussels etc etc. Even a few Greek dips. It's probably just as well that I had a reasonable walk home.



... with lots of crunchy bits left over

March 7 Lakes Entrance to Foster

Check out was entertaining. There was no sign of the chap at reception, just a note on the door with his mobile number on it. I rang him & said that I needed to pay. He said that he'd see me later. I said I was leaving town now. He said he thought I was there for several days. I said I wasn't. He said that he'd come back in ten minutes. I waited and he did.

He asked how much I'd been quoted. I said \$98. He said he'd be happy with \$90. I paid and left before he could change his mind.



The footbridge ...

The footbridge in the middle of the town leads across the lake, then the path crosses some dunes and leads to one of the most amazing beaches I have ever seen. The weather was perfect and there weren't many people about. Quite idyllic.

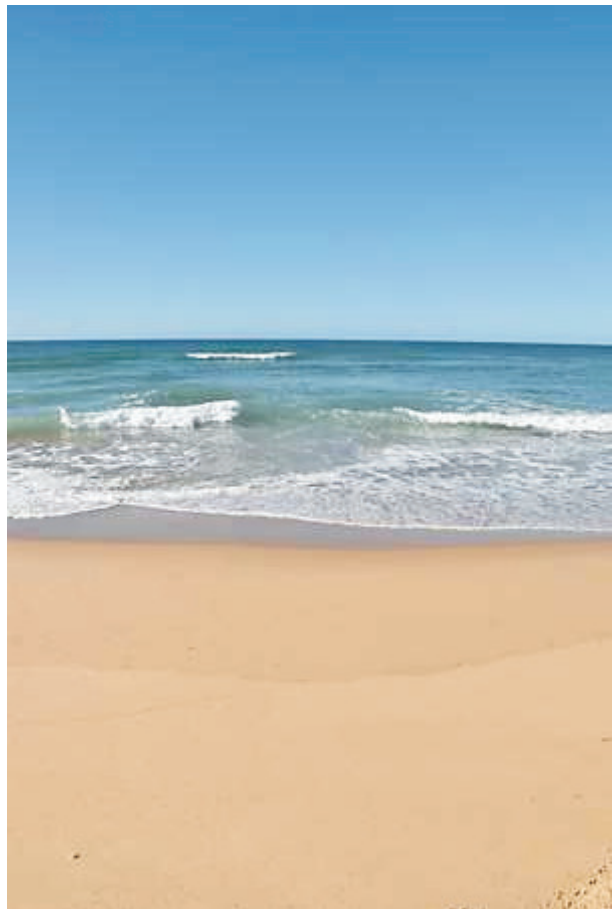


... Across the harbour

I collected the car and drove to the Information Office at the edge of town for a map and suggestions of where to visit next. The Museum was next door but it wasn't open on Wednesday so I didn't go in.



Excellent views ...



... A beautiful beach ...



... and the remains of a fierce local



View across the lakes

A little further along, the road climbs a small hill with a viewing platform at the top. This gave excellent views over some of the lakes.



Metung



A reasonable coffee

The village of Metung is a few miles further on, ten minutes down a side road. It has shops, cafes, a marina and some posh houses. Very smart. I had a coffee, nice enough but typical for Australia.



St Mary's, Bairnsdale

Bairnsdale, half an hour along the main road, isn't very exciting but has an amazingly decorated Roman Catholic church. Apparently, in 1931 an unemployed Italian artist, Francesco Floreani, arrived in the area seeking farm work. The local Roman Catholic priest saw the quality of his painting and paid him with his own money to decorate the church. It took him until about 1938 to complete the task and the results are outstanding.



St Mary's, Bairnsdale



St Mary's, Bairnsdale

Many thousands of people visit the church every year. It is a trip well worth making. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to photograph.



Healthy green stuff

I explored the town or what there was of it, which didn't take long. Outside the library was an elaborate globe thingy, which linked all of the world's Stratfords - except for the one in East London. Don't know why they forgot that one. It was an obvious piece of artwork but, the omission of my local Stratford excepted, it was well done.



Bairnsdale - only the church is exciting

The water tower was probably more in keeping with the rest of the town although there were a couple of other interesting buildings including the rotunda. I couldn't see anywhere exciting for lunch so I continued on to Stratford, another half hour to the West. A deli and wine tasting café offered a very healthy looking salad with added chicken. Lots of green stuff in it so it must have been good for me. It certainly tasted good.



It shows almost all the Stratfords

The sign to the station attracted me so I detoured 100 metres up a side road and found a small station. The line went from Melbourne to Bairnsdale and stopped here three times a day in each direction. Needless to say, it was very quiet as the next train was a couple of hours away.

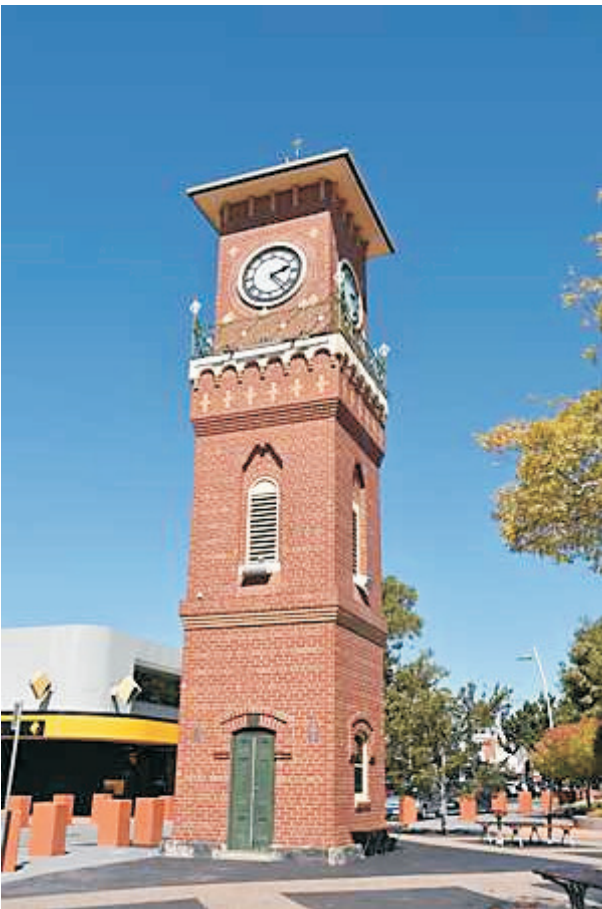


Not a busy piece of track



Stratford Mechanics Institute

The Mechanics Institute showed that there was a little history to the place but that was about it.



The clock tower

I returned to the car and drove to Sale, the regional centre. This had a fair number of shops and a bank, so I withdrew some cash.

Architecturally, there wasn't much to see. A clock tower, a music shop and a magnificent old school, Gippsland Grammar I think, which I only saw whilst driving past. It is a service centre rather than a leisure one.



The road ran straight & true ...



... with some scruffy trees on either side

From there, the road ran straight for a long way, with a thin band of trees to either side and farmland behind.

I had thought of doing some exploration of the National Park but realised that I wouldn't reach Foster until after 16.00 so just continued along the main road until I got there.



The motel wasn't hard to find

Foster is small so the motel was easy to find. They were expecting me and my unit was smart.



Flowers and the pub

I immediately set off on a tour of inspection. There was a large pub, some flowers and a few shops. I found some Aboriginal artwork in a small park and that was just about that.



Some Aboriginal artwork

Back at the motel, I organised some of my belongings - yet again - and prepared for dinner in the pub, the only option other than a takeaway.

The steak was OK and the salad surprisingly good. I returned to the motel for cheese and coffee.

March 8 Foster to Melbourne

Not a morning for photography. I left the motel at 09.00 under a clear blue sky which continued for the rest of the day.

The road started quite hilly, with views of open fields to either side. Gippsland is very pretty and probably worth a much longer stay. It is also a big food producing area!



A pretty tea shop with rubbish coffee

After an hour of reasonably light traffic, I spotted a tea shop up a lane just off the road. It was a pretty little cottage with a nice balcony overlooking the garden and some light scrub. Unfortunately, the coffee was rubbish but I needed a rest.



Beautiful surroundings

I found the first turning that I required, onto a much busier road, and then the next turn onto the M1 Motorway. This had lots of road works, started with two lanes and ended up with five. The traffic was very heavy, much of it large trucks.

I followed my nose for another hour, finally reaching the bridges and tunnels where the motorway entered Melbourne. My car had a widget stuck to the windscreen, which pinged whenever I passed a toll road sensor. At some stage my credit card will be hit with a bill.

(This turned out to be about £7, not too frightening.)

Luckily for my piece of mind - I was already very stressed as I always am on the Melbourne motorways - the signs started mentioning the airport. I took a steep spiral turn from one motorway to another and finally, after about three hours, pulled off into the airport.

The pressure didn't end here as I had to locate the rental car garage and the petrol station - but not in that order. As ever, I had to drive straight through the garage in order to reach the petrol station. This involved a few violent manoeuvres but I just managed to avoid causing an accident.

With the car suitably replenished, I handed it over, took my bags and started to relax.

The airport bus took me through huge quantities of road works into the city. At Southern Cross Station I checked the cash on my Myki card - there was enough - and took a tram to the hotel. Seeing me staggering under the weight of my bags, a nice young man offered me his seat. There are benefits to growing old!



... in the middle of shopping paradise

The hotel, a lovely old building, which is on Little Bourke Street, in the middle of what is considered to be shopping paradise, was expecting me, took my bags but couldn't give me a room for an hour. I went outside to relax and try to forget the stress of the drive.

I had hoped to visit the local branch of HSBC, about five minutes walk away, to buy some cash. Unfortunately, I had left my phone at the hotel in one of my bags and my ATM card was in it.

I continued a short way to Young & Jackson for a much needed beer, relaxed and wrote my diary. At long last, I could let the beer dissolve the tension. Everything had gone according to plan but it took a long time to unwind. The Goose Island IPA was very hoppy and made me feel much better. I don't know what it did to my blood sugar and I didn't care!

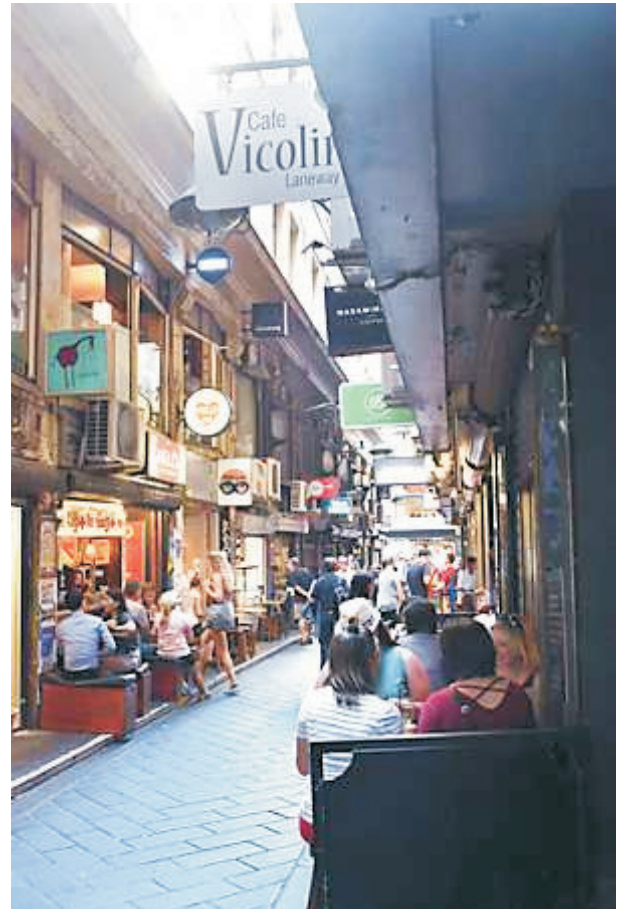
Over the road from the pub, opposite the station, is the Tourist Office. I collected some brochures and asked about tomorrow night's rugby and a possible boat trip. I obtained the information that I required and dived into the lanes to find lunch.



An old building ...



The best way to relax!



Lunch in the lanes

I found some pies which appeared to consist of more filling than pastry so ordered a chicken and spinach one. It arrived with tomato sauce and a side salad. Good but not light.



Young & Jackson

I wandered around the lanes for a while then crossed to the Town Hall to find a Ticketek office, where I bought a ticket for tomorrow night's rugby - at huge expense. I just hope the game is worth it!

My visit to Federation Square to use the free wi fi wasn't a success. I will have to return later.



Tribute to a much lamented hero

Not too far away is AC/DC Lane. I saw on the TV a few weeks ago that there is a new statue to Bon Scott in residence. There was also a cartoon of the recently departed Malcolm Young. Strange when you think they were Scots from Fremantle and Sydney respectively.

I walked home slowly through Chinatown, which is the far end of Little Bourke Street.

My room was available and very smart it was too, with excellent views over the street and the people passing below.



Rights for something!

After a rest, I returned to the fray and immediately encountered a demonstration blocking Swanston Street - the main drag. Last year it was animal rights people. This year it was women. Had I been thrown off one of the stationary trams, I would have been cross.

I managed to make the wi fi in the Square work, then walked up to Flinders Lane and Chin Chin, a restaurant I have wanted to visit for years.



They were all queuing for dinner

There was a huge queue of young people outside. I spoke to one of the intimidating looking guys who was trying to organise the queue and he said that he could find me a seat at the bar - one occasion when being single was an advantage.

This he did and I sat in a very noisy and gloomy restaurant. The green curry was excellent and they even offered brown rice. I was probably the oldest person in the place. It would be good to eat the same, excellent, food in an atmosphere which would do it justice. The queues outside, however, suggest that I'm the odd one out.

I returned to the Square, sent some more emails and returned to the hotel.



A spectacular chicken curry



Federation Square



Town Hall flowers

**March 9
Melbourne**

A leisurely start to the morning. Blue sky and 30 degrees forecast.



Strange Melburnians

I breakfasted in my room, then walked down to Federation Square to check for emails. En route I passed some rather bizarre statues and lots of building work relating to the new railway line through the city.

The square was full of school parties, obviously having days out in the big city.



School parties everywhere

I had planned to have a boat trip up the river in the morning but, when I reached the booking kiosk, the nice lady apologised profusely and said the river in that direction was closed for several days for a festival. How inconvenient!



Over the river

I crossed the river and entered the Arts Centre, to the Music Vault, a celebration of Australian popular music. It took me a while to find it as The Vault wasn't underground and the signs were misleading.



ARIA Hall of Fame

The first thing to catch my eye was a list which contained Dame Nellie Melba, Percy Grainger and AC/DC.

These were all inductees into the Australian Music Hall of Fame. Other than that, it was a trifle disappointing. One of Angus's school uniforms but nothing much else of excitement.

I repaired to a café on the South Bank for a quite reasonable long black and a chance to re-plan my day.



All the fun of the fair

Under the bridge is a path alongside the river to the Botanic Gardens. I was soon to see why the river was closed to boats. On one side of the path a large fair or similar was assembling for the Labour Weekend.



They were flying through the air

On the river, itself, was a wake boarding competition. An announcer was building it up to be like a full house of 90,000 at the MCG. The audience was, in fact, somewhat smaller. I watched some impressive aerobatics and a few spills and tried to take photos. Only time will tell if any of them are sharp.

This being Australia, the Botanic Gardens are full of trees. I wandered around in the heat for an hour. It was all very restful, there were views of the stadium I would be attending in the evening and there was a punt on the lake. A lovely way to spend the morning - but hot!



Melbourne Botanic Gardens



Flowers ...



... trees and lakes



What's left of a cold beer

The only solution seemed to be a beer at Young & Jackson. After much deliberation, I had the lower alcohol version of the Goose Island IPA that I had yesterday. Very good and very cold.



Another lunch in the laneways

Lunch was in the laneways, a decent Caesar salad and a coffee. I mustn't drink too much alcohol!

With the sun becoming increasingly hot, I visited the branch of ANZ (my bank) which has its own brochure at the Tourist Office. The building was a spectacular gothic edifice and used to house the stock exchange as well as



Gothic splendour

the bank's offices. The main bank office is amazing but, for fairly obvious reasons, photography isn't allowed. Even getting a photo of the outside is difficult because of all the trees. I did manage one or two photos of some of the less sensitive areas and had an interesting tour round the banking museum.



Surrounded by trees

Discretion won over valour at this stage and I walked back to the hotel for a long cool rest.

I actually went to sleep for a while and finally emerged after a couple of hours.



Friday night is out & about night

Outside, it was hot and buzzing. On a Friday, everyone leaves work and heads to the bar.

My plan was to visit The Imperial, opposite Parliament. It was heaving. The next pub along wasn't quite as full but it had a low ceiling and was very noisy. I walked towards Federation Square, tried two more and gave up.



The Square was quite quiet

The Square was relatively quiet and I found plenty of room outside a café for a light snack and a small beer.

My walk towards the AAMI Stadium took me through the now open fun fair. I crossed a few large roads and arrived at the stadium with ten minutes to spare.



AAMI Stadium

I have always considered that the Australians are experts at organising sports events. This was not one of those occasions. As I was climbing the steps, a steward was begging us to use another entrance as there was a ten minute queue outside this one. Loads of us walked round the outside of the stadium to the opposite side and passed through security. My fears that someone might object to my camera proved groundless so I was able to walk half way round the ground again to find my allocated seat. In the end, I might just as well have queued for ten minutes as it took me that long to walk round the ground a couple of times.

The reason for the queue was never explained as the ground was a maximum of 20% full and there were huge open spaces on the terraces.



There was some play

There isn't much to say about the match. The first hour was pretty bad. After that, the Rebels, the home team, took control and ran out easy winners. The game was more stop than start, with the trainers on the pitch almost outnumbering the gulls. In the end, an extra 25 minutes was played - nearly 30% longer than the scheduled time.

I walked home through a different part of the fun fair and watched the water skiing, which was still going on under floodlights. It was hard enough to photograph in the daylight so I didn't even try in the dark.

I finally reached the hotel after a 40 minute walk, including about five minutes collecting emails in the square. I wrote up my notes and downloaded photos.

March 10 Melbourne

In spite of the late night, I woke before my alarm and was out of the hotel by nine. The day was forecast to be 33 again but with the sun still rising, it was pleasantly cool.



Victoria Market

I walked across the city to the Victoria Market in the hopes of finding a Turkish breakfast as part of the Turkish Festival. That was late getting up, however, but I was able to watch the ladies making Turkish dumplings - manti, I think - under a cloud of smoke. It looked like the Queen Mary.



Dumplings or the QEII

I explored the usual mix of amazing food stalls, then negotiated with one of the delis for a pork sandwich in rye bread. It contained lots of vegetables so it must have been healthy.



A local rock legend

I sat and listened to the elderly busker (turned out to be a year younger than me) doing a lot of talking and little playing. He seemed to know everyone. He spent ages discussing AC/DC with one couple. It is odd that they are so well commemorated here, when I saw little mention of them in Sydney, where most of the band grew up.



Some Brisbane natives



Decorations on the market building



Melbourne Exhibition Building with fountain

I took another short walk to the park, about to be closed for the annual flower show, and the magnificent Exhibition Building. This is Victorian extravaganza at its best. I took photos of the flowers and of the fountains.



Phar Lap - a good Kiwi bloke

on Lonsdale street, excavated from under a car park in about 2002. It gave a fascinating insight into the lives of the urban poor in the 19th century. It was the biggest archaeological project in Victoria. In the UK we would call it current affairs!



The main building

Next door is the Museum. Quite a building. The nice man at the desk let me in for nothing as I was old. What a gentlemen.

I like the Melbourne section, even though they do lay claim to Phar Lap, one of the many successful Kiwi claimed by the Australians. There is a new section dedicated to the excavation of Little Lon, the slum area



A resident bird

The Museum has an enclosed "forest", which is rather nice and even has some resident birds. I spent over an hour having a gentle wander and then emerged into the heat. Gertrude Street is almost opposite and leads the way into trendy Fitzroy. It contains some old houses and a splendid pub - the Gertrude - or rather it used to. It also has lots of posh cafes and restaurants, including Cutler & Co, one of the country's best.



Gertrude Street



Gertrude Street went on and on



The Gertrude Hotel used to be a good pub



Some parts were industrial

The Gertrude Hotel looked very derelict, a shame as I had planned to have a beer there. I resorted to The Builders Arms, a short distance up the road.

After more than a kilometre, I still hadn't found the river so I turned right until I found the tram lines in North Richmond. This is a very cosmopolitan area, bordering on Little Saigon. The Vietnamese influence was obvious, both in the buildings and the food markets.



The Builders Arms



Vietnamese trams?

They gave me a tasting of two IPAs, both good, so I had a pot of each and a bowl of small fried prawns - School Prawns, they called them.

The tram arrived, packed to the rafters. It was one of the older ones, without air conditioning. My attempt to tag on with my card wasn't successful but I got on anyway. I then realised that I had been using my Opal card from Sydney. When I found my Myki card, it worked exactly as it should have.

In spite of the heat, I decided to walk due East until I reached the Yarra River. I followed Gertrude Street, out of the trendy part and through some older and more run down areas.



Vietnamese vegetable stall

We clattered our way Westwards for about twenty minutes until we reached the CBD, where I disembarked and managed to tag off using the correct card.

With the heat being hot, I decided to forget the health issues and dove into Young & Jackson for another very cold beer. I walked back to the hotel and hid from the sun for a couple of hours, watching League on the TV.

I left again at about 17.45, walked through crowded streets for about ten minutes until I reached the Greek Quarter, arriving at Tsindoes at about 17.55. It was almost full but they found me a seat in a corner.



Greek lamb and salad

I ate large quantities of dips and far too much feta. The lamb was definitely peasant style - lots of bone and odd bits - but amazingly tender and full of flavour. Even the Greek house white was perfectly drinkable. As I ate, they started to turn people away, so it was a good job I arrived when I did.



A grubby window to look through

I walked down Swanston Street, which was heaving. Like London, they are building railways underlying the city. Here, they are at the early stages with completion due in 2026. There is a large hole to look at and several windows to look through.



They hope the new trains will work



The Square was still busy



Sunset over the Yarra

Federation Square was very busy. The free wi fi worked but my attempt to check in to tomorrow's flights, didn't. I made a brief excursion to the river, took some arty photos and then returned to the hotel and completed my packing.

March 11 Melbourne to Paraparaumu

The hotel is brilliantly situated right in the centre of Melbourne. Unfortunately, on a Saturday night, Melbourne must be the noisiest city outside a war zone. It was a long time before I got to sleep.

Completing my packing in the morning was quick and easy. I walked down the road in glorious sunshine for less than five minutes, waited at the tram stop for another five and was then transported to Southern Cross station in a few minutes more.

There was a bus awaiting me there and, about 50 minutes after leaving the hotel, I was being shouted at in the airport.

Melbourne is one of the nastiest that I use. The city is OK - probably much better than that. The airport isn't. I was soon checked in,

however, and found my way to the Koru Lounge to while away the time before take off.

We were slightly late leaving and slightly late landing. Nothing remarkable happened. There was a bit of a delay at Christchurch biosecurity as a Chinese plane had just landed but I was soon through.

I spent something over an hour in the terminal, found a roll which looked healthy but tasted very dull, and finally departed on my plane to Wellington. Just like the one across the Tasman, this was packed. A taxi took me to Jane & Robert's and all was well for the evening with food and chat at home.

