

Those of us who have been to the CCOA national meets over the last few years probably know Charles Welch. He is the member who usually wins the award for traveling the longest distance to the meet. He comes about every other year from Perth, Western Australia, Australia. (That is not stuttering. Western Australia is the name of the state.) For the geographically challenged, Perth is on the western side of the country. That is way further from the U.S. than the rest of the country.

This story actually starts about 55 years ago when a young girl from Australia picked out a letter from a prospective pen pal in the United States. Many of you remember that school project from the 1950's. Pick out a pen pal from a foreign country to practice your geography and writing lessons. Most of these endeavors lasted about 3 or 4 letters then the shine wore off. It was different for Maggie. She has been in constant touch with her pen pal for all of those years.

For the past few years the Australia half of the pen pal duo has been planning to visit us. She and her husband tried a couple of times a few years ago, but health problems intervened. Maggie and I have always wanted to make the trip so after we retired about 8 years ago we began planning in earnest.

In October 2012 we flew into Sydney and did the tourist thing there and at Cairns on the east coast. After about a week, we were met by Maggie's pen pal and her husband and were taken on a tour of the area west of Melbourne. We saw a live sheep shearing on a farm. We got close to kangaroos and petted koalas in the wild. One just started up a tree and stopped so Alan reached up and petted him. We drove the Great Ocean Road. It compares to Highway 1 in California with much more access to the beaches. The cliffs by the ocean are steep and stairs are quite a climb to reach the beach.



Sydney



Koala in the wild

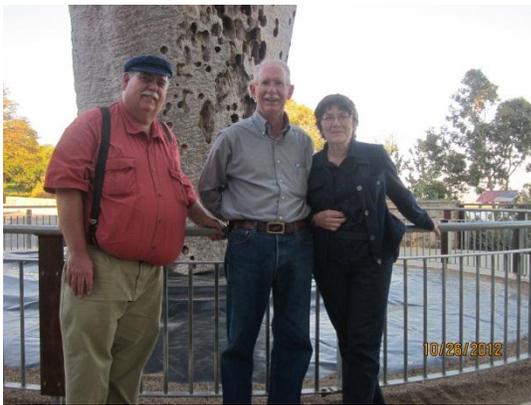


Koala and young



Great Ocean Road

Close to the end of our trip we jumped on a plane and flew to Perth. An airplane ride was necessary since the country is slightly larger than the U.S. Imagine going from Florida to California. Charles met us at the airport in Perth. From there he showed us 3 days of great scenery in the area. We toured many places in the Perth area. We visited King's Park and Stirling Gardens with its beautiful Jacaranda trees in purple bloom. We visited Whiteman Park with its tractor and motor museums and rode in an old street trolley. We took a wine cruise up the Swan River to a very beautiful winery. They "forced" us to sample wine all during the trip. (Can't beat that.)



Boab tree in King's Park



Wine cruise



Stirling Gardens



Jacaranda Tree in bloom



City of Perth

Charles is not just a Cushman rider. He has two 2-car garages full wall to wall with restored motorcycles. All the way from a 1929 Harley with matching sidecar, 1916 and 1948 Indians, a BMW R69S and several makes that most of us haven't even heard of outside of exotic museums like a 1938 DKW. He and his late father restored them over the years. They are in close to museum quality in their restorations.



1929 Harley with sidecar

Of course, there are a few Cushmans. He has the green 1949 Model 62A that was written up in the CCOA magazine Vol. 23, No. 3, November/December 2008, a trailster and some 50 and 60 series machines. Most are in a beautiful state and some are waiting work. (Don't we all have some of them?)

Charles's home has orange, mandarin, lemon and quince trees in the back yard. Perth is at latitude 30 south. That would be equivalent to north Florida in the northern hemisphere. It does get cold but not too bad. Since we were there in October, it was just the start of their spring season. It was cool in Melbourne and Sydney since they are further south (latitude of New York City) but it was warm in Perth. Perth is also on the Indian Ocean so the temperature is moderated by the proximity to the ocean. We visited the port in Fremantle, a large port where the container ships dock. We saw a couple off-loading their cargo (probably from China).



When we finished our pleasant visit with Charles, we boarded a plane to fly to Sydney then to the U.S. We flew into Los Angeles then to Albuquerque and caught a shuttle bus home to Santa Fe. It then took us about a week to get our internal body clocks back to normal.

During our month there, we sampled many different types of food and drink. We ate Vegemite spread, Barramunda fish, meat pies, fish and chips and drank ginger beer. We drank the local James Squire Premier Lager beer and of course, sampled the wines on the cruise. We ate at a place named "The Elephant and Wheelbarrow Pub". We learned words and expressions that were foreign to us. We saw the world famous Sydney Opera House. We toured the Perth Mint and saw a gold coin weighing 100 kg worth \$53 million. We learned of many ship wrecks of people trying to get to Australia. We saw animals that are only on the Australian continent. We learned history of the area. And best of all, we shared the experience with friends.

Someone asked us if we would do it again. I think we will wait until the transporter from Star Trek is perfected. It is a LONG flight from Los Angeles. And Charles does it every two years!