

TASMANIA HERE WE COME

*Mc Barker*

In 1960 while visiting my uncle in Sydney I was urged to prolong my Australian Holiday to go down to Tasmania where my cousin Tui Whitehouse had taken up fishing as a change of occupation from banking.

Tasmania was beautiful then, -- I flew to Hobart where my cousin met me and we drove to the little seaside settlement of Orford. The three days in such a delightful place was all too short, and though I had visited many parts of Australia, Tasmania was where I had always wanted to return. The opportunity came when the University of Canterbury Extension Studies Department organized a Geology Study Tour in January 1975, this presented an ideal opportunity to combine my interests of Geology and Botany in one trip.

We, the twenty eight including our organizer Mr. I.G. Clark, and Geologist, David Bell arrived at Melbourne late at night at the same time as several international flights. But with all the ensuing congestion at the Air Terminal Tullamarine, we were recognized as a special group and tided through in good time. While we waited for the arranged transport to the Town House in Melbourne, we watched in fascination the Customs Officers dealing with their finds and red lights flashing when they unearthed forbidden goods. After a comfortable night in Melbourne and a leisurely breakfast in our rooms, we were taken back to the airport and our Trip Proper really began. It was a beautiful day and the smaller plane gave us a good view of Bass Strait before we landed at Launceston, a charming town. From there we passed by St. Marys a very old town where I was somewhat startled to see a young girl of 13 or 14 years skinning a Tasmanian Devil as nonchalantly as if it was a potato! Soon we were on the coastline, and Tasmania is all coastline, very rugged and tortuous on some coasts, but on this south coast were lovely sand beaches. I had wondered what fifteen years since my first visit would have done to Tasmania. Apart from controversial conservation issues such as flooding Lake Pedder, Tasmania had only changed for the better. Orford was much the same plus a few more holiday baches, a few more residential homes and an attractive hotel.

Geologically the island is very interesting and our enthusiastic fossil hunters found their rewards, Dr. Bell finding a complete trilobite, and a schoolteacher cracked a rock to find amethyst in the centre. Geographically speaking one of the most interesting features to one like me; born on the Canterbury Plains, was the high Central Plateau, with the Great Lakes, forests, and very many lakes and the rivers. There was a timelessness about the island, historically some twenty, thirty or more years older than most New Zealand settlements, we were fascinated by the old restored homesteads, preserved churches, gaols, convict settlements and beautiful old stone bridges, built by craftsmen of a bygone era.

Botanically the landscape affords a great diversity in the Flora, with the forests, alpine conditions, subalpine and swamplands. My one regret when we left on our return from Burnie was that we had only just passed through at Derwent Bridge a very small part of the vast National Parks. Lake St. Clair was divine, in our lunch break there we were able just to sample one of the many walking tracks.

I am sure no person interested in Nature and History would regret visiting this delightful State in the Commonwealth of Australia.

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