

St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

JUNE - JULY 2001 EDITION



Photo Courtesy of
The Good Weekend Magazine
Sydney Morning Herald
Date Unknown

Christina Stead's Birthday July 2, 1902

PRESIDENT	Mrs. Bettye Ross	(02) 9589 – 0229
SECRETARY	Mrs. Valda Behag	(02) 9546 – 2819
TREASURER	Mrs. Dora Lenane	(02) 9181 – 2121
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT	Mr. Wesley Fairhall	(02) 9546 – 5555
VICE PRESIDENT	Mr. Bernard Sharah	(02) 0567 – 8989
RESEARCH OFFICERS	Mr. Arthur Ellis Mrs. Pamela Herrick	(02) 9529 – 4879
SOCIAL SECRETARIES	Mrs. Dora Lenane Mrs. Joan Fairhall	(02) 9181 – 2121 (02) 9546 – 5555
PUBLICITY OFFICER	Mrs. Joan Fairhall	(02) 9546 – 5555
BULLETIN EDITOR	Mr. Richard Henke	(02) 9587 – 8307
LYDHAM HALL COMMITTEE	Mrs. Bettye Ross Mrs. Gloria Henke Mr. Bernard Sharah	(02) 9589 – 0229 (02) 9587 – 8307 (02) 0567 – 8989
PUBLIC OFFICER	Mr. Robert McGarn	(02) 9587 – 4469
AUDITOR	Mrs. L. Thompson	

Meetings are held 8 PM every second Tuesday of the month (except January) in the Meeting Room 1st Floor, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale. Members, please bring a plate. Visitors are welcome.

NEXT MEETINGS

July 10th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This meeting will be the societies Annual General Meeting where the new Executive Committee is to be voted in.

OUTINGS/EXCURSIONS

July 15th Christina Stead Day

12:00 pm – 4:00 pm at Lydham Hall. 18 Lydham Avenue, Bexley, NSW 2207

\$ 4.00 for Adults \$ 3.00 for Concession/Pensioners \$ 2.00 for Children

On this day we celebrate the Birthday of Christina Stead our famous International Authoress who lived at Lydham Hall, our local Historic Building.

There are Drinks, Biscuits and Snacks provided and St. George Historical Society will be showing a movie called “For Love Alone” which was written by Christina Stead.

Come along for a day where people get together and enjoy themselves as well as having a look through the House.

October 14th A Village Garden Ramble through Bundanoon

Share the hospitality of 12 Village Gardeners & view a spectacular display of Waratahs at the Bundanoon Flower Farm. One Ticket covers all gardens.

Adults - \$12.00 Pensioners - \$8.00 Children – Free

Ticket Sales on the day at the Garden Market in the Memorial Hall.

Shuttle Bus available from the Station for the Garden Circuit.

For further enquiries contact Mrs. Joan Fairhall on (02) 9546 – 5555 or Marina Beaumont on (02) 4883 – 7285

FINALE

This is my last letter to you as President for the financial year ended 30th June, 2001. I wish all those who take up Office for our new financial year beginning 1st July, 2001 the very best of wishes and joy in their roles for the coming twelve months.

Please do not forget that after our next Meeting on Tuesday, June 12th, 2001, the following Meeting on Tuesday, 10th July, 2001 is the night for the Election of the new Executive Committee and, if you wish to nominate yourself or another member and cannot attend that particular meeting, please advise our Secretary, Mrs. Val Behag of your interest. The positions are listed on the second page of this Bulletin with the current Office Bearer's names. The Membership for the new financial year is also due from 1st July, 2001.

I have enjoyed once again my term as President though I don't know where the twelve months have gone and anyone who takes up this role I'm sure can come up with new ideas. My one disappointment has been the lack of attendance of members at our Monthly Meetings which is very disappointing for those who book speakers, however I duly thank the stalwarts who diligently attend and also put their names down for the Roster of Lydham Hall for Sundays or when mid week functions are on.

I take this opportunity to thank all those on the Executive Committee and others who assist for their help during this last term as President and wish all Members and their families a continuing year of good health.

Bettye Ross

THE EDITORS REPORT

It will not be long before it comes to the Tuesday, 10th July, 2001 meeting in which the Executive Committee of the St. George Historical Society will stand down and a new Committee will be voted in. I would like to take this time to offer my sincere thanks to all my fellow members of the Executive Committee who have helped me and the society greatly, to all of those who have volunteered their time and services for committee functions and duties at Lydham hall and finally all of the members for their contributions and feedback to me and the society on how well we have done. Not only is this year the Centenary of Federation but it is the International year of Volunteers. The people in this society who showed diligence and commitment to this society should all be greatly praised for the work they have done.

We were so sorry to hear that Mrs. Joan Byrne had met with an accident in a shopping centre and had broken her patella (knee cap), she was severely incapacitated by this event, Joan we suggest that you do not practice your high jumps in this manner. See what visiting the Olympic Games can do to a person.

For others who are not well, the society sends its prayers and well wishes for a speedy recovery.

It would be wonderful to see more members at our monthly meetings, please make an effort to come to even one meeting during the year. The guest speakers always deliver an interesting talk on their area of knowledge. I would also suggest members to support Mrs. Dora Lenane and Mrs. Joan Fairhall by attending the outings organised by these ladies.

I would like to thank Mr. Wesley Fairhall, Mrs. Betty Williams and Mrs. Bettye Ross for their contributions towards this bulletin.

WANTED – Any ARTICLES of interest, SUPPLIED BY OTHER MEMBERS. Have you visited a historic building or annual show which you thought would be suitable for us to arrange a trip to please put pen to paper and tell us about it. I am always eager to hear from you and share your ideas with others.

To send me something :	Phone me on	(02) 9587 – 8307 or 0414 – 339 – 510
	Mail your news to	27 Waratah Street, Bexley NSW 2207
	E-mail me at	rw19475@yahoo.com.au

kindest regards,
Richard Henke

THE END OF AN ERA

Pioneer Coaches has been a means of transport in the St. George area for many years. Its Depot was located on the corner of Waratah Street and Forest Road in Bexley. As you will see from the article to follow, it was owned and managed by the Iffland Family until it was sold in 1986-87 to the Harbridge Family.

Recently this service to our community was taken over by “Connex - SouthTrans” and the company Pioneer Coaches has been closed. This service now consists of White busses with Yellow and Black Writing instead of the familiar Red and Blue bus that we all knew so well. Sadly, as you can see, this is the end of an era.

G. J. Henke

JOHN MURPHY OF “LEEHOOLME”, BEXLEY AND THE HORSE BUSES.

John Joseph Murphy was born at Concord, New South Wales, in 1869. He was born with a great love of horses, which was to remain with him all his life. As a young man he entered the Meat Trade, in the beginning carting meat, and gradually learning every phase of the business over several years. He then entered into business in the Wholesale Butchery on his own behalf. Mr. Murphy was most successful in his enterprise, which he carried on until he retired in later life. He made a great deal of money out of it.

Margaret Prosper was born at Wattle Flat, 25 miles out of Bathurst, in 1868. Her Father (who was French by birth), whilst ploughing his paddocks one day turned up one of the largest nuggets of gold found in Australia It was known as the “Prosper” Nugget. As a young girl Margaret came to Sydney to live, and later she met John Murphy. After they had known one another a short time, they married at St. Thomas' Church, Lewisham.

After their marriage they went to live in Queensland, where Mr. Murphy had work. Eventually they returned to Sydney to live, settling at Rozelle. Mrs. Murphy went home to Bathurst for the birth of their first child, a son, whom they called Cedric. Three years later they were blessed with a daughter, whom they christened Violet Marguerite. The family lived at Rozelle for about 15 years, and then moved firstly to Five Dock and then Leichhardt for a short time, and then in February 1906, they moved to Arncliffe. Here they lived in a two storey stone house situated on the Highway, near Arncliffe Station. The house had been built by a “Cousin Jack” (a Cornishman), who had at one time been an “Admirer” of Mrs. Murphy. It was said that the gentleman had died in the house, and this made Mrs. Murphy feel uneasy and unhappy, so eventually they moved in September, 1907, to that delightful cottage “Mimosa”, on Forest Road, Bexley, right opposite the street also bearing the name “Mimosa”.

“Mimosa” was originally built for Mrs. Clune, Widow of Dr. Clune, and has white washed walls and grey slate roof, with cast iron columns supporting the roof of the front verandah. The windows are those quaint many pained modified Gothic type. On either side of the Gate Posts stood Pine Trees, which gave the impression that they were guarding the driveway to the house. Today “Mimosa” has a modern fence and garden.

Mr. Murphy used to deal in horses, which he bought sometimes at sales in the Metropolitan area, and sometimes in the country. Some of the horses he kept for his own use, and others he sold. The horses were kept in paddocks adjoining “Mimosa”. On one occasion his son Cedric, went to the Country and brought back 15 horses. There was always a demand for horses in those days, by both the Business Merchants for their drays, etc. , and also by private people for their sulkies, etc.

At this time Mr. Murphy had the Slaughter House at Bestic Street, Rockdale. It had formerly been Whitby's Slaughter House. The Drivers used to bring the cattle down to a paddock in Gibbes Street, in the late afternoon, where they would remain until the early hours of the morning, when they would be taken down to the Slaughter House and killed.

When the Murphy family went to live at "Mimosa" there was a horse-drawn bus service operating from Mimosa Street to Rockdale Station. It was owned by an old man named Joe McGrath, who lived in Mimosa Street, near Downey Street, Mr. McGrath's Bus Service failed, in fact he went broke, and the business was put up for auction. Mr. Murphy attended the Sale, and so that Mr. McGrath would not lose everything, he "bought the buses in", if they did not bring the "Reserve Price".

Mr. Formby, who owned the property adjoining "Mimosa", said to Mr. Murphy, "Why don't you buy and run the buses, so that we won't have to walk to Rockdale every day?"

So Mr. Murphy together with a family friend, a Mr. Dean of Northbrook Street, Bexley, purchased the 'Bus Service' and went Partners. After a while Mr. Dean said to Mr. Murphy, "You are doing all the work John and I am doing nothing, so I think you should take them over on your own. " So Mr. Murphy agreed and so became the Proprietor of the Coach Service. So now he had three businesses: his Wholesale Butchery, Horse Dealing, and the Horse 'Buses.

Mr. Joe McGrath, the previous owner, was employed by Mr. Murphy to drive the buses, and of course Mr. Murphy drove them himself. Mr. Bill Huckstepp of Mimosa Street, was sometimes engaged as a relieving driver.

The Coaches, which were drawn by 2 horses, were built of wood, and were approximately 5ft. wide by 12ft. long. The Driver sat outside at the front of coach in all weathers. He did everything. He drove the horses, collected the fares, and helped the patrons enter and alight from the bus. The part of the Coach where the passengers rode, was boarded up to about armpit level on all sides, excepting the back, which had a door for entry. It had a roof or hood, and canvas blinds, which were rolled up in good weather, and let down and fastened to the sides in bad weather. The seats ran along the sides of the Coach and across the front. The front seat accommodated 4 to 5 persons, whilst the side seats took 6 to 7 persons, The whole of the vehicle was painted black and highly varnished. The Coach had 4 wheels; the two front wheels were somewhat smaller than the back wheels.

The Bus Service commenced at 8:10 am each morning, starting at Mimosa Street, this was for the business people. When the passengers were safely seated inside the bus, including Mr. Formby, who was a "regular", John Murphy would climb up into the Driver's seat, take the reins in his hands. crack his whip, and away they would go. Trotting along past Nurse Scott's Cottage, which was overshadowed by its huge Magnolia tree. Then gradually gathering speed as the road curved at Smithson's house, and round the bend passing the Preddey's gracious two storey home "Besborough" standing well back from the road in its extensive grounds, and just beyond its semi-circular red gravel driveway. The clean sweet aroma wafted down to the passengers in the coach, from the huge pine trees, standing like mighty sentinels in a long line behind the white picket fence. John Murphy would call to the horses, urging them on. How he loved to sit there above them, reveling in the beauty of their arched heads, flying mains and tails, and the rise and fall of their gleaming satiny backs. Onward would press the horses, pulling 'the coach around the bends and curves of Forest Road. The continuous merry jingling of the harness, and the sharp ringing sound as the horses hoofs struck the hard stoney road, were music indeed to the ear, not only to the driver and passengers of the coach, but to those who lived along the route, and beyond. The clear sweet air of the Bexley Hills bore the happy sound far away. Away sped the coach over the hill, going by the fire station and Stone's house, each of these buildings standing on either side of the top of Queen Victoria Street, and commanding marvelous views of Botany Bay and the land between, including the Railway Line and Kogarah Station. John Murphy would draw the horses to a halt outside "Cluny Brae" (now Victoria House), so that the McLeod's, who were "regulars" could enter the bus. Then down the hill passing Kinsela's to Dunmore

Street, where a pretty girl named Linda McKenzie, would get on. Along Forest Road, and turning into Harrow Road, and speeding down hill by homes both large and small, along Watkin Street, and so on to the terminus at Rockdale Station. John Murphy would climb down from the driver's seat, secure the reins, give the horses a "well done" slap on their backs. Then he would go to the back of the coach and help his patrons alight.

On the homeward journey the horses would slow up somewhat as they climbed the steep grade of Harrow Road. Certain high spirited schoolboys were wise to this, and when school was out, and the jingling of the harness heralded the approach of the coach, they would take up vantage points, and as it went along the road, they would jump up and hang on the back of the bus. There they would gleefully stay, holding on with all their might, until someone called out "Whip-behind". Then the Driver would flick his whip to the back of the bus, and the miscreants would dump off and run to the side of the road laughing, having gained a free ride and a terrific thrill..

Some of the passengers would come along to catch the bus of a morning still eating part of their breakfast. It was all very countrified. The bus always stopped and waited for anyone who was running late.

The bus service ran from 8:10 am in the morning from Mimosa St., an hourly service most of the day, excepting for "quick trips" during the peak hours. The "quick trips" or fast trips were made by going along Albyn Street, instead of to the top of Harrow Road and along Forest Road. During the busy period Mr. Murphy would put a young horse with an old horse, and when the passengers got on the bus and saw that Mr. Murphy was driving, they would say, "We will have a fast trip home tonight" But they were never afraid, as they knew that Mr. Murphy was an absolute expert at handling horses, and anyway the bus mostly had the road to itself. The last bus from Rockdale of a night was 10:00 pm. If you were going to the Picture Theatre at Rockdale on Saturday night, you caught the 7:00 pm. from Mimosa Street, and you would arrive at the Pictures at 7:15 pm. Nice and early. The next bus was at 8:00 pm. , and if you caught this you would arrive a quarter of an hour late.

It was the duty of the daughter, Miss Violet, to see that the "Change" was ready in the collection bag each morning, and it amounted to Three Shillings. This seems fantastic, but then the fare to Rockdale was Two pence, later can to be increased to Three pence.

Old Joe McGrath, when he had a day off from driving the buses, how did he spend it? Did he go to Sydney Town to see the sights or do some shopping? Did he go down to the Beach for a swim? or did he just potter around or rest at home? Not he. He spent the whole day riding up and clown on the buses, occasionally getting off and refreshing himself at the Hotel. Well no doubt it was a very pleasant way to spend one's spare time. Swapping yarns and jokes with the Driver and passengers, and picking up the local gossip and news. On each trip would be new company, with new yarns, new jokes, and new gossip. Even if Joe had to make the trip on his lonesome, he could settle back and daydream, whilst the sunshine pleasantly warmed him through. Or he could watch the passing scenery, or the fascinating sight of the metal studs and ornaments on the horses' bridle Hashing and sparkling in the sunshine. If the weather was wet and wild with the heavy cold rain drumming on the roof, and the mighty gusts of wind pushing hard against the sides of the coach making it sway. How cosy, warm and intimate it would be inside the coach. Joe was a simple man, and he found less joy in simple pleasures, as indeed did most people in those more leisured times. Old Joe's dream of the perfect life, (or so he said) was to have a room full of money. When you had need of some, you just went and took what you required.

Sometimes the right of the Coach to use the centre of the roadway was challenged by that well known personality, Jimmy Clarke, who used to walk daily from Smithson's Wine Bar (now the Bexley Golf Club house), to Brighton-le-Sands. If the Bus did not keep a good enough distance from him, he would give it a mighty wham with his walking stick. He usually encountered the bus between the Fire Station and Dunmore Street.

The Murphy's lived at "Mimosa" for about 6½ years. Most of the entertainment was in the home in those days. They in turn were invited to parties given by their friends. When they lived at Arncliffe, the daughter Violet used to attend school at St. Joseph's Convent at Rockdale. Here she became great friends with the Moran girls, who also at that time lived at Arncliffe. Where the Murphy's moved to "Mimosa" the Moran's went to live at "Glendolough" (now the Salvation Army Boys' Home, Bexley North). It had formerly been the home of their Grandmother, Mrs. Wolloghan. The Moran's also had parties for their daughters and their young friends, and to quote Miss Violet Murphy, "It seemed like going to the end of the earth to get there, the going was so rough. But it was really well worth the effort, as when we finally got there, we had such wonderful times. We used to dance all around those lovely verandahs. "

Mr. Murphy then decided to buy the block of land opposite on the corner of Forest Road and Mimosa Street on the northern side. It was owned by a Mr. Buchanan, who owned a Silk Shop in Sydney. He bought the block, which was 58 ft. on the slant along Forest Road for £2 per ft. , £116 all told. When the sale was finalised, Mr. Buchanan shook hands with Mr. Murphy and said, "I hope you have more luck with this ground than I have had. I have paid rates on it for over 20 years, and I am selling it to you today for less than I gave for it". Mr. Murphy later on bought the two adjoining allotments.

Mr. & Mrs. Murphy built a very large bungalow on the land, which was set amidst lovely lawns and gardens. They called the house "Leeholme", after a beautiful house they both admired in the Bathurst district, which was the home of the Lee family, All the family loved their new home. It was a very spacious place, with plenty of room to move about in, and every comfort . It had verandahs on every side, some were open, and others enclosed with large glass windows the whole length One large glassed in sun verandah looked across the lawns and gardens to the tennis court Friends came regularly to play tennis and spend many pleasant hours of enjoyment with the family, From the house they had a clear view through to the Fire Station in one direction, and up to St. Mary's Star of the Sea Convent in the other direction. Between "Leeholme" and the Convent was McCarthy's weatherboard house, which stood between Mimosa Street and St. George's Road. Then there was nothing except paddocks until you came to Waratah Street, here were two nice brick homes, the first being the home of the Fosket's (now a Convalescent Hospital), then the McEwan's house, and then the Convent. On the opposite side of Forest Road going south was Formby's, then "Mimosa", then a two storeyed house just before Wilison Road This house had had several owners and tenants, and for some time was used by the Priest of St Mary s Church in Croydon Road, as his residence Further on was "Alabama House" standing like an English Castle in miniature, with its towers and battlements, amidst its beautifully terraced lawns on which strutted a number of peacocks. Then the large Estate of the McConnachie family with its extensive and uninterrupted of Botany Bay. (Now Sydney Technical High School).

When the Murphy went to live at "Leeholme" the bus service was beginning to really prosper, but so were Mr. Murphy's other Investments. He had given up the Slaughter House at Rockdale, and was buying his meat from the Wholesalers at Homebush, This meant that lie had to have extra horses to pull the heavy meat vans carrying tile huge loads of carcasses, especially in the winter time. The horses used to "knock up" pulling the loads through what is now Kingsgrove Road in the wet weather The so-called road was just a mass of heavy yellow greasy clay. He used to keep changing the horses all the time, When someone commented on his pair of horses once, Mr. Murphy said, "Oh yes they are a very good pair. one does all the work, and the other is content to let it."

At this time John Murphy found it necessary to have someone reliable to drive the buses, as there was no way to keep a check on things. There were no tickets issued, etc So he asked his brother-in-law, Mr. Don Berg, to come and drive for him. This gentleman lived at Concord. He had been a Baker, but had retired He and his family moved to Bexley, and he more or less took charge of the driving etc of the buses But his family were never happy in Bexley, as they missed their old home and friends and interests at Concord. So eventually Mr. Berg left the employ of Mr. Murphy and took

his family back to Concord Mr. Murphy would probably never have sold his Horse 'Buses Service, if the Uncle Don could have stayed on.

Mr. Con Ifland who was a Cousin of Murphy, came down from the Country and wanted to buy the Service, So Mr. Murphy sold to him two Coaches and two teams of horses for a figure that would not cover the cost of two tyres of today's buses Mr. Ifland sold his home and whatever other interests he had, and came to Sydney to take over the buses The night Con !Hand came down from the country to take over, kindly Mrs. Murphy could not sleep, as she was afraid he might not make a success of it and lose his money. She need not have worried, because he never looked back. The business has been a huge success. Con Ifland first driving the Horse Buses himself, and later changing to motor buses when they came into use, The population steadily increased, and the bus service was extended first to Waratah Street, then to Hurstville Station, and now to Beverly Hills Station. Mr. Murphy was proprietor of the Horse Buses from about 1909 to 1916.

Mr. Murphy continued as a Wholesale Butcher for a number of years, (luring which time he built a Meat Depot in Mimosa Street, which had a "Chilling Room", where carcasses were placed if they had to be kept over Might. The top of the brick front of the Meat Depot was struck by lightning during a bad storm in 1922. On another occasion it had all the corrugated iron roof torn off and tossed away over onto Forest Road during another big storm. Eventually at the commencement of World War 2, in 1940, the business was floated into a Company under the name of the John Murphy Pty. Ltd. just around this time Mr. Murphy retired from business to live quietly at "Leeholme" until his death in 1947. The firm John Murphy Pty. Ltd. still flourishes today, in conjunction with McPherson Bros. and M.I.D. Co. as Wholesale Butchers at the State Abattoirs.

"Leeholme" was sold about 9 years ago, in 1959. to be exact. It was demolished soon afterwards, and a Service Station was built on the sight The Service Station is now the headquarters of the St. George Taxi Centre.

Source: St. George Historical Society Bulletin August 1968.

THE SOCIETY'S DAY OUTING TO "VAUCLUSE HOUSE".

On Thursday May 17th we met up with Dora Lenane at Circular Quay and proceeded by bus out to Vaucluse to visit "VAUCLUSE HOUSE" which was once the home of William Charles WENTWORTH and his wife Sarah.

We arrived there early and as the guided tour was not until 12:30 we found a nice place in the gardens to sit and have our picnic lunches in the lovely sunshine and admiring the gardens and lawns .

Our tour guide was a very knowledgeable young man who gave us a splendid commentary on the house and the family that had once lived there. The Wentworths had ten children altogether and lead busy lives.

What impressed us mostly was how this home has been so well preserved and cared for as it had been many years since most of us had previously visited there, and it is wonderful that "Vaucluse House" still stands there proudly today for future generations to visit.

I would also like to thank Dora for arranging our day as there is a lot of organising with days such as this, and Dora really puts her heart and soul into these days, so a big thank you to Dora.

Betty Williams

VICE PRESIDENTIAL ADVENTURES OVERSEAS - STAGE 1

JULY 21st, 2000 - NOVEMBER 23rd, 2000

As promised, I have recuperated sufficiently to put pen to paper (or more accurately, two fingers to keyboard) and hereby present a BRIEF written meander through some of the memorable episodes of my travels...

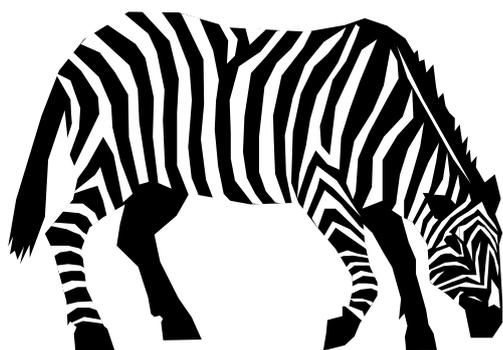
In this journal I would like to recount a few experiences from my time in Africa (where I visited Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Uganda) between July and November 2000. Initially, my travels were undertaken with a degree of luxury (naturally for acclimatization purposes only...), so private lodges in game parks with a personal driver and tour guide were de rigueur, not to mention sumptuous feasts of a great variety of game, such as eland, ostrich, warthog, zebra, gemsbok, crocodile and many more ...but with due consideration to the sensibilities of vegetarians I will not elaborate further.

From such game lodges in Kenya and Tanzania, I traveled in a four-wheel drive on morning and evening game drives. My guide was a 25-year-old Kenyan whose passion and knowledge of the flora and fauna were second to none. My time in his company enabled me to encounter, often at exceptionally close range the likes of elephants, buffalos and the elusive leopard. I was also able to meet the locals, such as Massai people who still adhered to their traditional pastoral lifestyle as well as spend time in many a remote village, quite off the beaten track. Oh the sunsets, photographs would never do them justice. One highlight was seeing the tail end (no pun intended) of the annual zebra and wildebeest migration in the Serengeti, thousands of animals and thundering hooves.

A memorable experience was my close encounter with a “Lady of the Night”... I was occupying the last room in one of the Kenyan lodges, when late one night some peculiar squeals and rumblings came from just beyond my door. Bravely, my paisley pyjamas and I went to investigate. I walked over the low bridge connecting my accommodation to the main walkway... nothing, that is until I turned to walk back. Well I have nothing against a lady with big teeth, even if they are somewhat dirty and misshapen, BUT coming face to face with a highly agitated warthog sow and her (presumably, who knows these days) piglets was a tad disturbing. The lady in question was now occupying the path between my room and me...

What to do?

1. Walk in my paisley pyjamas (a kindly friend having previously advised me that paisley went out of vogue a decade ago) to administration for help, the prospect of which was rather less appealing than being gored to death by my warty acquaintance.
2. Camping out until the said sow became disinterested and trundled away, it was however very chilly and she was not giving ground.
3. Scaling an eight feet dry stone retaining wall, backtracking through some gently undulating countryside, descending the same dry stonewall and with great discretion and cunning sneak behind the beast and slam the door... This option won the day.



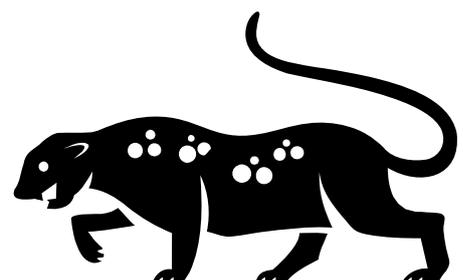
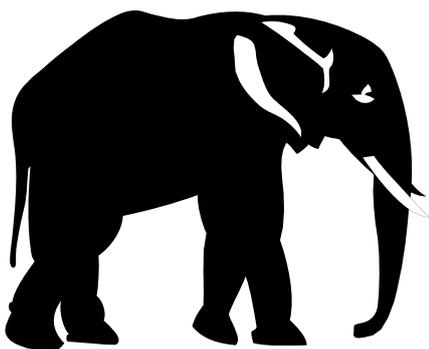
I was subsequently advised that she (the warthog) was a “regular” at this time of year and the area outside my door was her usual abode. Well, the way to any warthog’s heart is via the stomach (we had much in common) so a few bread rolls later and we were the best of friends. A happy ending.

Another potentially close encounter was with a young bull elephant in a Tanzanian game park. We were stationary on a dirt road watching a family unit of elephants file across the road. The elephants were indifferent to our presence and sauntered along nibbling at tit bits as they went. Suddenly an adolescent bull elephant took a dislike to our being on his turf. Ears unfurled wide and flapping, he took a number of menacing steps forward and rumbled threateningly. I was advised to remain perfectly still and QUIET... (I was frigid with fear so the initial part of the instruction was easily followed, it took great will power however to heed to the second) after a pregnant pause he shook his majestic head, lunged forward to within 10 feet of our vehicle, then with head held high turned away, he had conveyed his message. Let me assure you, elephants are HUGE, especially when displeased.

After the private safari, I spent time on the enchanting spice island of Zanzibar, famous or perhaps infamous for the cutthroat trades in gold, ivory and slaves during the 18th - 20th centuries. The culture was an eclectic mix of Arabic, indigenous African and colonial charm. Nominally Islamic, the locals seemed to imbibe as much of the “amber fluid” as the tourists. When I was there, the people seemed very welcoming and there was no hint of the disquiet that was to erupt less than 7 weeks later. A highlight here was the daylong spice tour. I was taken to view many herbs and spices such as cloves, ginger, nutmeg and most interesting (in my opinion) vanilla beans, which were obtained from a climbing orchid.

South Africa was similar in many ways to the east coast of Australia especially with regard to the climate and vegetation. It was here that I undertook a botanical expedition organized by a group from the *Strybing Arboretum Society* of San Francisco, California. Two experienced South African botanists took us through a number of botanical gardens, national parks and private reserves to view the indigenous and largely endemic plants growing there. Proteas and allied plants are related to Australia’s banksias and grevilleas etc but what makes South Africa unique is the abundance of different species of plants in a given area found nowhere else, for example, the side of a hill or in a number of cases in less than a hectare of uncleared land. The other phenomenon is that the nature of the habitat and species can change dramatically from one hill to the next. New species are still regularly being found. This trip also coincided with the peak wildflower blooming period, so I suppose, in the manner of Western Australia, there were vast carpets of flowers in a great many colours, especially yellows/oranges and blues/purples. Spectacular!

The next section of the trip saw me “overlanding” (camping) from Cape Town to Zimbabwe. So life suddenly took on it could be said, a rustic charm. Highlights of this trip were Namibia, a starkly beautiful country famous for having arguably the tallest sand dunes in the world. Climbing them felt akin to trekking through dense beach sand on a 60-degree slope. Once again memorable sunsets. In Namibia I indulged in a tandem skydive from 12,000 feet, I am glad that I did it but will lose weight before my next attempt as it was rather straining on certain parts of my anatomy! We visited a cheetah conservation project where the owners had a pet cheetah that took great pleasure in accompanying us to view the wild cheetahs being fed. One of my companions probably still bears the marks of this cheetah’s teeth on her ankle, just a playful nip!



In Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls was obviously a highlight; it was here that I went for a helicopter flight over the falls, white water rafting, jet boating, elephant riding and of course an 111 meter bungee jump from Victoria Falls Bridge. There were a great many other activities that I could have done had time permitted. Another highlight was visiting the Great Zimbabwe ruins. These are regarded as being the only major remains of a great black African civilization in sub-Saharan Africa. The massive grey stone block ruins looked in retrospect somewhat like those of the Incas in Peru. The third highlight was visiting an Antelope Park in which was housed the lion breeding project. We had the opportunity to “walk” two 14-month-old lionesses, by this stage about 3 feet high at the shoulder and 7 feet long. At one point I was up a tree with a lioness clutching playfully at one of my boots as she hung dangling in mid air. My boot survived the adventure with her razor sharp claws rather better than my pants.

In Uganda the definite highlight was my one-hour visit with a group of “habituated” gorillas in the Bwindi National Park. We hiked for 2 hours 30 minutes to see them under armed escort. What amazed me was the relative silence of these apes when compared with the likes of monkeys or chimpanzees. We were treated with respect, the 2 massive Silverback males (each over 200kg) watching us to ensure that we did not threaten their family members. The females were about half the size of the males and more confiding. The juveniles however were full of adventure, curiosity and mischief. They joyfully clambered amid branches, scampered across the forest floor and would quite possibly (given the opportunity) joined our group and accompanied us back to base camp. Sadly these animals are extremely vulnerable to poaching and habitat destruction, so their future is far from certain.

I then spent 3 weeks with friends in South Africa prior to flying to South America, but the South American leg will have to wait until the next issue of our bulletin.

It is good to be back and I look forward to seeing as many of our members as possible in the coming months.

