

CHRISTMAS AT CHEZ WOMBAT 2003



Well this is it. This is our last Xmas letter from Chez Wombat (Wallsend Branch). The next one will be from our Leeds, UK Branch, to be established during 2004. I wonder what Leeds will make of our Wombat obsession?

This letter is going out a little early because Garry will be away most of December and will return on Xmas Eve ... this early mailing is not an evil plot to make you feel guilty about the tardiness of your Xmas card writing but feel free if you're obsessive. The Antarctica photos are from Garry's Dec 2003 trip, which were not available for last year's letter. No holiday snaps this year since we haven't been on holiday.

You may have guessed from the perkiness of the letter so far that health wise we are both feeling pretty good about ourselves. Other than the cumulative impacts of age and gravity (the girls out there will know what we are talking about) Veronica continues to plough through life at a frightening pace unabated by failing eyesight, hearing, and in Garry's opinion, memory, etc, etc (That remark will not be forgotten...V). Garry has finally recovered from his autoimmune illness of the last 3 years, disposed of most of the spare tyre he acquired during the enforced convalescence and recovered some degree of fitness. Though they never did find out what was wrong with him an early, unknown variant of SARS is firming as a high probability in Garry's mind, as a result of a meeting with Chinese visitors from which several people got sick with a nasty pneumonia. He still has minor relapses if he gets an infection (e.g. cuts, cold/flu) but is otherwise back to his normal offensive self.

Garry was in Leeds from January to July, returning to Newcastle for the 2nd half of the year to wrap up some projects, though not as many as he had originally hoped to finalise ... sigh. The 1st half of the year was spent getting up to speed in the new job. Mostly it's been up to expectations, though the unexpected departure of the person who recruited him was a disappointment. His office is in a heritage listed



building with high ceilings and wall to ceiling glass at one end overlooking a park. He spent many good thinking hours looking out the window. His spare time was spent getting oriented and developing a feel for local real estate. Relative to Newcastle we are going to take a hit

in both price and quality. We sort of expected that and factored that in when deciding on the move. By good fortune a friend, Barbara Hayes, living in Princeton got married when Garry was returning to Australia in July and he managed to catch up before the honeymoon, meeting the lucky man (those who know Barbara will appreciate the significance of this).

Veronica started work in her new position as Clerk of the Local Court at Scone at the end of January. While she misses the friendly people of Quirindi she has enjoyed the challenge of her new position. She works at Scone three days a week, Murrurundi one day a week and the other day alternates between being an extra person in the office on list days at Muswellbrook Court and a chamber magistrate and Government Access Centre outreach service to Merriwa (where she uses the Shire President's office at the Council chambers). Veronica introduced the Government Access Centre service to Scone at the beginning of the year. Basically this means that she carries out a number of the simpler, most frequently used transactions/services on behalf of other State Government Departments. She has also used her statistical skills to analyse workload data for the union.

Much of Veronica's spare time has been consumed by further family history research and her book is expected to be completed by Christmas. Much last minute information has been received from distant relatives in the Withers family but fortunately this is the last chapter in the book so hasn't delayed the production schedule.

Our travelling this year has been relatively light as you can imagine. We haven't had any holidays together this year, nor had extensive contact with family and friends. Garry's travel has revolved around work (Nice ... nothing of note but



OK ... Who took the ladder?



"Kempsey Carolina" ... isn't she cute?



Ahhh ... snakes ... they're not so bad



I think I can ... I think I can

the Riviera Coast to Monaco is nice ... and southern Spain). Back in Australia it has included some travel to catch up with people and fieldwork up the valley. No news from Veronica.

Veronica's 13 year old niece Miriam (Gillian's youngest daughter) spent January with her going to work during the week (she may have rethought her ideas about a career in law) and going for outings at weekends to various sights around Newcastle, Australian Reptile Park near Gosford, Tamworth Country Music Festival and a superb Sheffield Shield cricket match in Newcastle. (Michael Clarke blasted a century, Mark Waugh scored over 150 runs in the match as elegantly as ever and Steve Waugh declared that it was one of the best matches he had ever played in). Well, Veronica was there to see the exciting finish when N.S.W. won by 3 runs with 3 balls to spare at 6.00, p.m. on the final day but Miriam had decided that cricket, like country music, should be sampled in small doses. For Miriam the highlight of the holiday was having a Burmese python wrapped around her at Australian Reptile Park and surviving to tell the tale. She also made numerous visits to the video shop using Veronica's new membership card – something that Veronica hasn't used since.

The main visit this year was Veronica's brother, Peter, and his family who stayed for a week in the October school holidays. Having two children around was a bit of a shock for Garry (who had been mostly living by himself for 10 months). While the weather wasn't great (no trips to the beach this year), Sophie had a fun time being involved in the holiday Junior Ranger program at Blackbutt Reserve, and Lucinda loved tagging along with her older sister. They also enjoyed a ride across Newcastle Harbour on the Stockton ferry and a visit to the Regional Museum, which has one floor devoted to hands on science exhibits. Garry had his model railway running in the lounge room for the first time in several years and Peter and the girls enjoyed operating that. Lucy would hop up on the chair near the controls and nod very sweetly

when asked if she wanted to drive the trains.

With all the things going on Garry's family had a farewell/early Xmas celebration last weekend. As a present from Garry's eldest sister we are now the proud adopters of "Kempsey Carolina" a Koala injured in a road accident and being cared for at the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital, run by the Koala Preservation Society. She can't be released back into the wild because of poor eyesight (we can empathise) damaged in the accident. Veronica is contemplating a visit before she leaves.

So what are our movements in 2004? Well Chez Wombat is on the market and hopefully will be sold by the time you read this. Those that have visited and appreciated the pool, trees and wildlife in the backyard will understand why this has been hardest wrench of the move. Veronica will continue to rent her flat in Scone for the time being. Garry will be back in Leeds from mid-January 2004, while Veronica will be moving in March-April sometime. We will have a University flat until July and after that we will either be moving out to other rented accommodations or to a house we have bought. In 2004 it's probably best to contact us through Leeds University (Veronica Antcliff, C/- Prof. Garry Willgoose, School of Geography, Leeds University, Leeds, LS2-9JT, UK; email g.willgoose@geography.leeds.ac.uk) until we are sure of our movements. We will set up mail forwarding to my brother in Sydney but you never can tell. Until Veronica leaves she can be contacted through her work (Scone@agd.nsw.gov.au), after which we will set up something for her at home in Leeds. Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year in 2004 from everybody at Chez Wombat.

Garry and Veronica

