

# Christmas 2014

You might have noticed we have not sent you a travel epistle lately. The last one was from Christchurch where we spent last Christmas, housesitting. We arrived back on New Year's Day and haven't travelled beyond Australia's shores since. Geoff tells me that this year, therefore, sets the record for us for the shortest period of time spent overseas. He knows these things. Nor are we great users of Facebook or of other social media (yet). So, prompted by the approach of Christmas, it is time to scrape off the rust and connect with you all again by steam-driven email.

We have been staying within cooee this year for good reasons. (Overseas friends, Google will tell you about 'cooee'.)

Ian, the younger of Geoff's two brothers, was having chemotherapy for a cancer that was hard to diagnose. It's most likely it started in the appendix and spread. We decided not to stray too far so as to be more accessible to Ian and Jeannine. Top on Ian's bucket list was the Eiffel Tower. If we were to travel overseas at all this year, Geoff was keen to help make that wish happen, if Ian's health permitted. Sadly, just before Easter and with Paris unvisited, Ian passed away, aged 67. We miss him as do so many others.



Someone who is quite pleased we have been home more



The Mareeba wetlands inland from Kuranda, memorable for the Red-backed Fairy-wren flitting through the undergrowth on the path

Ornithologists Group provided the volunteers for a government survey and I was thrilled to be part of a group of eight. My knowledge of GPS navigation, two-way radio and bush-whacking in challenging terrain grew exponentially. The ten-minute periods of sitting to watch and listen for birds under the tree or perched on the slope that I was led to by the GPS were welcome rests. I even got to ride in a police boat (a story in itself). It was certainly more eventful than conference organising!

Yet another reason we stayed around is that the world came to us. We put on the hats of tour guides for a group of four Dutch and Swiss friends. Geoff thoroughly enjoyed designing an itinerary for them. Their first stop was with sister Alison and Graham. I helped Alison show them Fraser Island and the Sunshine Coast. Later, Geoff and I took them on a grand tour around the south-east corner of NSW and Victoria. We were very proud that, all in all, we managed to show them—in the wild—Dingo (on Fraser Island), Platypus, Echidna, Wombat, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Swamp Wallaby, Sugar Glider, Flying Fox, Brushtail Possum, Humpback Whale, Common Dolphin, Australian Fur Seal, Red-bellied Black Snake, Emu tracks in the sand, Goan-

A couple of months after Ian's funeral, we sought a quiet break in a bush retreat near Kuranda in north Queensland. We snorkelled on the reef for the first time. We took our binoculars for outings with local birdwatchers. We unwound. We might go back.

Another reason we stayed closer to home is that I (Chris) was organising a conference for the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies here in Canberra. Geoff was fully involved too, especially with designing the materials. Close to 150 people came along in early October. My email traffic has slowed dramatically since.

A few weeks before the conference I escaped from my desk to join a bird survey on Lord Howe Island. The Canberra Or-



After we finished surveying birds on Lord Howe Island, the seas were calm enough to visit Ball's Pyramid, the world's tallest volcanic stack and much loved by nesting birds

na, various other reptiles and all sorts of birds including the Glossy Black-cockatoo. No Koala in the wild though they did meet plenty at Lone Pine Sanctuary In Brisbane.

Our guest bedroom has been well used by other visitors this year too, especially family members. Ian and Jeannine visited exhibitions in Canberra not long before Ian died and our house was a staging post around the time of Ian's funeral. Our neighbours have been wonderful. They have provided beds for the overflow and there have been times when we gave our house completely over to guests and found a bed for ourselves up or down the road.

**M**eanwhile, our various clubs and our two churches keep us provided with hats to wear—treasurer, chairperson, secretary, warden, caterer, community gardener, check-out operator, website designer, webmaster, sign writer, bookings officer, purveyor of drinks and ice creams—as well as with many friends to keep in touch with. Geoff also kept his publications hand in and did the maps and the layout for a friend's historical novel.

On the family front, we welcomed our newest great-nephew Riley Hudson Ledger and marvelled at the engagement-party-that-turned-into a-wedding of nephew Scott and Freya.

Our caravan in the bush is our much-loved and well-used 'bolt hole' not far away where we can go for an afternoon's cuppa and a walk/swim or stay overnight and wake up to bird-song.

We are spending Christmas quietly at home in Canberra with friends, including some visiting from Canada. In January we head north to house-sit for sisters, first Helen and Ron and then Alison and Graham.

And after that? I want to focus on a writing project a friend asked me to have a go at. Geoff is concocting ideas for spreading our wings. Time will tell how it all pans out.

This comes with our love and Christmas prayers for peace in your lives and peace in the big wide world.



One of our picnics with Rosmarie and Rinze Marten (from the Netherlands) and Bruno and Vreni (from Switzerland)—this one in Monga National Park where we saw the Plumwoods and a Rufous Fantail

One of the intriguing visitors to our caravan. Can anyone tell us what member of God's creation this is?

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