

## **The Fortunes of Susan and Sebastian – A Whale of a Time**

(An account of the trip made by Susan Schaale and Sebastian Fink, German members of the HHR Society, to Australia in July, 2018)

Who would have thought that, when Susan met Dorothy and Graeme Charles at the Museum of Contemporary History in Leipzig (Zeitgeschichtliches Forum) in 2012, some six years later, they would meet in their Australian home? And still, here we were, July 8th, after 24 hours of travelling from Leipzig to Munich to Doha and on to Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. Finally there - at the other end of the world - we almost couldn't believe it. This feeling lasted for at least the first week, when we were waking up every morning in amazement to be Down Under.

And in such great company! In our second meeting with a group of members of the HHR Society in Leipzig in May 2017 we were generously invited. Graeme took care of the organization of almost the whole trip. It became a dream holiday from the start. Having dinner with Dot and Graeme at Janey Runci's and Helen Macrae's wonderful place near Victoria Park in Melbourne with the first taste of their delicious cooking (that we should be kindly provided with again through our last week of the stay) and the famous Australian wine started the delight for us. Having a beautiful bedroom with a balcony facing the Yarra River and a first glimpse of Australia's natural beauty kept it going.

After enjoying Janey's world class Muesli (that we've already copied over here), Dot and Graeme came to pick us up to their home in Wonthaggi, where they had invited us for the first week.

Still being a bit dizzy after the long journey we were wide awake when reaching Mount Dandenong outside Melbourne where we experienced a soothing smell of Eucalyptus we hadn't nosed in nature before. Despite the thick clouds blocking the sight of Melbourne from the top it was a special thing to us just to pick a Eucalyptus tree leaf and get a smell.

The same evening we had our first encounter with some curious looking kangaroos near Wonthaggi beach. And our animal-safari through Victoria had just begun. The next day the four of us boarded a boat for the Wildlife Cruise on Philip Island and hoped to see at least one of the Humpback Whales which are crossing the waters off the Australian shore at this time of the year. The day before, it had taken the Captain five hours to find one whale. Instead we and 70 other passengers were the lucky ones to see the first one after just a

few minutes showing us his tail fin. And it didn't take long before the first Bottlenose Dolphins joined our trip - jumping out of the water and keeping up with the speed of the boat right in front of the bow. About 10 000 seals greeted us from a rock in the sea where they enjoyed the winter sun and we got to see seven other whales, mostly females with their calves, easily spotted through the white steam coming out of their two blowholes. As the journey was almost over, one more was seen behind the boat, which made the trip unforgettable. The huge animal headed right to the boat, came up just right next to it and gave us impressive views of its sheer size. As a farewell it dived underneath the vessel - making even some of the seasick attendants run from one side to the other.

Back on Philipp Island we watched the Penguin Parade and were amazed by those little fellas just being washed to the beach and making their way up the dunes without getting distracted by the hundreds of visitors. What else could you expect from a first fully seized day in Australia? A nice dinner in the Whale Tooth Bistro of Wonthaggi (we strongly recommend it to all readers) completed the day.

On Wednesday we went to Wilson's Promontory and walked to the most southern tip of Australia. Still being in whale-fever we even managed to spot a few couples in the bay just off the hilltops. Also a couple of Wombats - Susan's new favorite animal - and a shy Wallaby crossed our paths. Not to mention the Crimson Rosellas who joined us for lunch and had a seat on Susan's shoulder. Thanks to the sunshine this day, I could even walk barefoot through the Tidal River and the shallow water of the South Australian Ocean.

Another natural wonder we found the following day thanks to the experience of our hosts who showed us a Dinosaur footprint near the beach of Inverloch that can only be found at low tide and with the knowledge where to search.

The evenings turned out to be as delightful as the days. While having wonderful conversations on HHR's work, world politics, environment and sports we enjoyed Dorothy's Pavlova and Graeme's grilled Kangaroo. Also they showed us the TV-series "Jack Irish" we are now enjoying at home. Freshly cooked porridge waited for us in the mornings - and of course the lovely crumpets - another Australian experience I wouldn't want to miss. Although we can't share Australians' passion for Vegemite, the worldwide influenced cuisine of the country met and expanded our taste.

The days flew by and it turned Saturday - matchday for Western Bulldogs-supporter Graeme who took the sacrifice to take us to the stadium despite foreseeing that his site would suffer a big loss. Though the result was as predicted, the team gained two new German supporters and a red, white and blue scarf has found its way back home to Leipzig.

Also we got to meet Henry the Koala that day in a wildlife park on our way to Melbourne, which almost completed our experience of Australian wildlife. We should see much more of it in our second week in Tasmania.

### Tasmania the beautiful

After a first class Italian dinner in the former Abbotsford Convent near Victoria Park and another night at Janey and Helen's we waved a first goodbye to our hosts and started an adventure on our own. One short flight down to Hobart later we picked up a car and went on the first stage of our six-day-roundtrip on the island, which led us to Strahan. What an experience driving in the dark on the narrow street through the rainforest, having Kangaroos and Wallabies jumping across the road all the time. The next morning - still not completely adjusted to the Australian time zone - we got up early to enter another vessel, this time to sail on Gordon River into the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Thanks to low winter season there were only 20 passengers joining us on a boat built for 250, so we could really enjoy the mystical atmosphere of the river and the old forest. We were even allowed to walk into the forest on a built-in footpath. Standing next to a 2000 year-old Huon Pine was a moment not to forget.

Also seeing Hell's Gate and Sarah Island and hearing the stories about the convicts working there almost 200 years ago was more than worth the trip. And the day led us from one beautiful site to the next. After leaving the boat we drove up to Cradle Mountain, where we went hiking the next day. Despite the stormy weather, the walk around Dove Lake was sensational. Although we got wet to the bones on the last 20 minutes of the two and a half hour-hike, we wouldn't want to have missed the waterfalls, the colorful trees and the view from the top of one of the hills surrounding us.

What amazed me especially was the Waldheim chalet near Cradle Mountain, because we have a famous town called Waldheim not far from Leipzig. Thanks to the kind help of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service I have written and published an article for the German newspaper Leipziger Volkszeitung about

this coincidence and I hope some of the readers will make their way to Tasmania to discover this wonderful site with the German name (which just means "forest home" while being a house built to accommodate hikers by the Austrian godfather of the Cradle Mountain-Lake St. Clair National Park, Gustav Weindorfer).

Our next stop was the fancy waterside town of Devonport where we tasted fine Tasmanian wine, and watched the surfers still on their boards after sunset in the freezing cold sea. Crossing Batman-Bridge we went on to the Platypus house near Beauty Point to get sight of those unbelievable little animals. As well, we also met some cute Echidnas which just walked around our legs.

After this marvellous experience our way led us to St. Helens for the next night and we enjoyed the drive down the east coast the following day with another stop - this time at East Coast Natureworld near Bicheno where we had a good time watching Tasmanian Devils being fed and strolling around, as well as seeing tiger snakes bathing in the sun.

Thursday night we finally arrived back in Hobart, where we enjoyed a visit at Mona the next day, had some of the meanwhile world famous Tasmanian Whisky (my recommendation: Lark Distillery), and visited Salamanca Market. The week was over in a rush - and we wished, we could stay a few more nights in the end - but the next adventure was already waiting ahead of us.

## Melbourne - Food heaven

Back in Melbourne we took advantage of Janey and Helen's kind hospitality again and dived into the big city flair. Equipped with Myki-Cards we explored the centre by train and tram and made our first appearance at the Victoria Market, where we would return several times because of the great food - like the spiral fried potato Susan enjoyed very much and the fried ice cream that was oversized even for my kind of appetite.

We saw the exhibition of MOMA-Art at the art gallery and walked with wonder through Melbourne's Chinatown, where we had delicious lunches and desserts.

Coming "home" to Janey and Helen's we enjoyed the company, watching the "footy" one night and "Jack Irish" on another, always having a great dinner they cooked for us.

The highlight of the week was to meet all of our new friends again. We were invited to join the HHR-Meeting in Maldon. There we met more lovely people connected to HHR and even made it to send several postcards from the actual post office where the author lived for six years. They even put a HHR-stamp on the cards.

To Dorothy and Graeme and the other HHR-Members from outside of Melbourne it was our last goodbye for 2018 that day. And we seized the last few days in the city more calmly, strolling through the depths of skyscrapers, putting a toe in the water on St. Kilda Beach for the last time and tasting more great food on Winter Night Market. But also we found it important to learn more about the history of Victoria and were glad to get the chance for a guided Aboriginal Walk on the banks of the Yarra with the Koorie Heritage Trust, where an indigenous artist told us much about the way of living and the rules of the tribes in Southern Australia. About the modern history of Melbourne we also learned in the Royal Botanic Gardens where we spent the last hours before we had to get off to the airport.

Kindly - for the third time - Helen and Janey made the way to Tullamarine to drive us. With uncountable memories in our heads and souvenirs in our bags we waved goodbye. Now, one week later, back at home, we're still amazed and grateful for those three weeks that gave us so many valuable insights in another world. It feels surreal to be 16 000 kilometres away again but at the same time we feel closer to all of our friends Down Under than ever. And we hope to see all of you again next year in Leipzig, where we will follow some more steps of HHR and hopefully enjoy a German meal together.

Auf Wiedersehen.

Sebastian and Susan