

VicRoads Association

Newsletter No.212



Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Current cost of membership is a once only fee of \$30 plus a joining fee of \$5. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary at 60 Denmark Street Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below.

Dear Members,

A few members contacted me about the Uluru Statement which I included in the last newsletter. They said that they had not previously read it and how touched they were by it. The fact that the Government at the time dismissed it so peremptorily possibly deflected attention from the document and few read it. I think too, many people thought it would be a diatribe – possibly with a bitter message – but in fact it is one page, written in a spirit of generosity with an undeniable wisdom and vision. I compare it to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address – brief, easy to understand and elegantly written.

It always annoys me when Australia drags out aboriginal culture when it suits such as the opening of the Olympic Games and yet our treatment of them leaves so much to be desired. Another thing – it irks me when politicians plead that we were all migrants to Australia. Imagine if you are aboriginal and you heard that said? They were here for 60,000 years before the Europeans arrived and they looked after the land a lot better than we have done in a little over 200 years.

I have grieved for a long time about the history of the treatment of Australia's first people by European colonialists. There can be no doubt that our European ancestors conquered the indigenous people as surely as the Spaniards conquered Peru but for different motives. In the end the conquerors had the numbers, the guns and the germs to prevail over people who hardly understood the concept of theft and war. In some cases, it was cold-blooded murder and in others it was the diseases that the white fellas brought with them.

Neither side understood the nature and culture of the other, and consequently there was fear. My great grandfather's ship, *Joanna*, foundered on what is now known as Johanna¹ Beach in 1843 and the surviving crew members had to find their way back to Geelong through the Otway Forest. In fact, they became the first European explorers of the region. They recorded that their greatest fear was not starvation or exposure but "the natives". It is ironic that they met a group of natives on the beach. Although they could not communicate the aborigines left one of their party with the stranded sailors and he guided them through the bush to a lonely station on the outskirts of the forest. Without his help their chances of survival were slim.

And there is always the issue of racism. We are probably all guilty of this at some time or another. Racist attitudes to aborigines are alive and well in Australia today. Look at the treatment of our star footballers. Some people were up in arms when Adam Goodes was made Australian of the Year. What a terrific man he is – and what a footballer! I loved watching him and my only criticism was that he played for the wrong team.

The important voices in Australia have to speak out against racism. This is not only our politicians (some of whom I doubt) but also leaders at work, journalists (forget about Keith Windschuttle who disputes what I have said above and denies the Stolen Generation altogether and was appointed to the Board of the ABC by Prime Minister Howard), church leaders, sporting men and women, historians, teachers and most importantly, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Children are not racist – it is only adults.

¹ The difference in the spelling arose because a sign writer misspelt the name when painting the sign on the post office in 1913.

I have always thought what a gesture it would be if we adopted the Aboriginal flag as our national flag. It is distinctive and colourful and stands out in any company – and it has deep symbolism. The black represents the colour of the people of Australia's first nations, the yellow represents the sun which sustains all life, and the red the colour of the earth. It, and the flag of the Torres Strait Islands, have been proclaimed and they have political and legal status. The flag was designed by Harold Thomas in 1971 and he holds world copyright on it.

Sadly, I doubt that this sentiment would be widely supported in the community and of course we would have to get the permission of the Aboriginal people to use it. Perhaps they might tell us to go jump in the lake, but perhaps many might think it is symbolic of a genuine desire for reconciliation.

I think it is far more significant for Australia now than the current flag which is the British maritime Blue Ensign with the Union Jack in the top left-hand corner. Its design resulted from a competition following Federation and it first flew in 1901. There have been minor adjustments (to the number of points on the Commonwealth Star) but it wasn't until 1953 that it was recognized and legally defined as the Australian National Flag. In fact, I remember when the Governor of Victoria came to Colac when I was in primary school, we were all given a Union Jack to wave.

With all the shenanigans going on in the UK regarding Brexit, it is not inconceivable that Scotland will secede from the Union resulting in another change to our flag.

Or am I just a grumpy old man?

David Jellie
President and Editor

Dates for your diary

Our program for the remainder of 2019 is as follows. We will provide further details of visits in later newsletters and remind members of upcoming events via email notices. If you are not on our email list, and you have email, please let us know your address. If you do not have email and you would like to come along, please contact the Secretary.

2019

November	Monday 18	2.00 pm	Bus tour of the West Gate Tunnel Project
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	Monday 25	12 noon	Occasional Lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
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December	Monday 2	12 noon	Christmas luncheon at Kew HO
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2020

February	Monday 10	12 noon	Occasional Lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
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April	Friday 3	12 noon	Golf Day at Green Acres, Kew
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Full details of forthcoming functions are provided on the next page



What's coming up

Occasional Lunch – Shoppingtown Hotel – Monday 25 November 2019

Bookings are not essential, but it would help with arrangements if you can let Kelvin York know on 9438 1028 if you can attend. We hope to see you there.

Bus Tour of the West Gate Tunnel Project – Monday 18 November at 2.00 pm

We propose to take a bus tour that takes in everything happening across the project. The bus will depart at 2.00 pm outside 121 Exhibition Street and return two hours later. Senior engineers from the Authority will accompany us and describe the various aspects of the project as we drive around and stop off at the info centre. The size of the group will be limited to the bus size so we will allocate seats strictly in order of receipt.

We will meet in the lobby at 121 Exhibition Street 10 to 15 minutes before the 2.00 pm departure so that we can board the bus and get away with a minimum of delay. Interested members should contact Jim Webber at jimwebber@optusnet.com.au to confirm their attendance.

Christmas lunch – Monday 2 December at 12 noon.

The location and arrangements for the lunch will be the same as for last year. Drinks and canapes will commence at 12 noon with lunch being served at 12.30 pm. The cost will be \$50.00 per head and we require prepayment either by cheque or bank transfer.

If you propose to come, please fill out the acceptance form at the end of this newsletter, and post it – together with your cheque to:

Iris Whittaker (for Jim Webber),
Secretary VicRoads Association,
60 Denmark Street
Kew, Vic 3101.

Cheques should be made out to VicRoads Association. Direct bank transfers should be made to VicRoads Association BSB 083323, Account Number 170934017 and you should include your name as a reference – so that we know who has made the payment. If you choose to pay by transfer, we would appreciate it if you ring or e-mail Jim just to let him know that you are coming. Please respond by Wednesday 27th November to allow sufficient time for catering arrangements.

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

As we have a vacancy on our committee, I am very pleased to announce that Nick Szwed has agreed to join us. He will be responsible for managing our website which has just been launched as mentioned in the next para.

WEBSITE FOR VICROADS ASSOCIATION

Thanks to the expertise and energy of Nick Szwed, we now have our own website. Its address is:

<https://vicroadsassociation.org/>



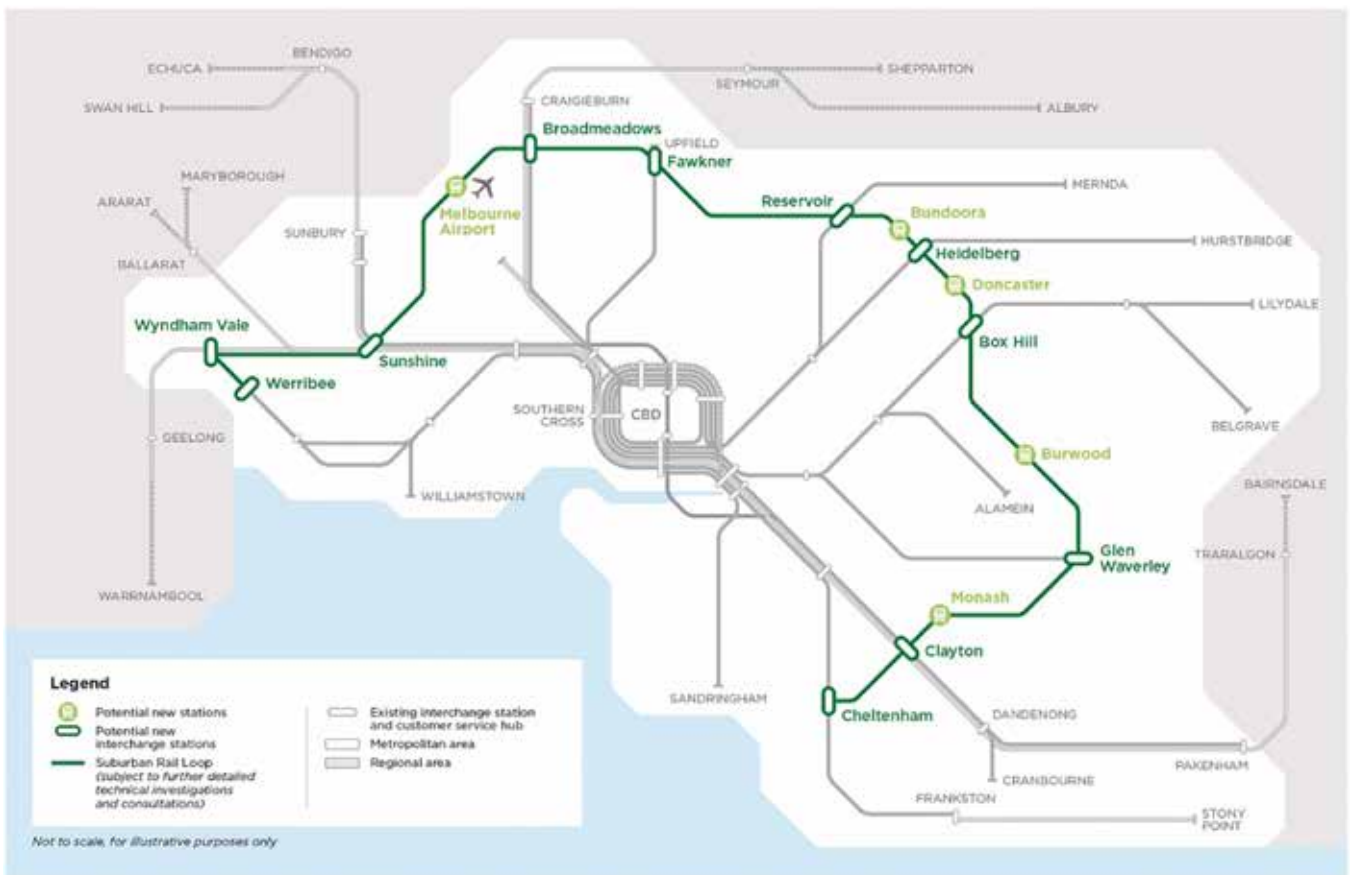
Nick has been loading data on to the webpage and he will become our webmaster so that if you have something that you would like to put on to the site – such as photos, stories or other memorabilia - then you should send it to Nick.

Nick will put up a method for contacting him via the website. The enquirer would provide name, email address and comment. Nick can then contact them back via the website.

What's been happening

Visit to Suburban Rail Loop

14 October 2019



We had an attendance of 30 people for this briefing. The CEO of the Suburban Rail Loop, Nick Foa, addressed us assisted by James Tonkin and Christian D'Agnolo. This is Melbourne's largest infrastructure project having a time frame of about 20 years for implementation. Nick emphasized that the project is as much about a land use story as it is a transport story in that it will stimulate and revitalize business centres along the route and considerably improve connectivity.

The Suburban Rail Loop will circle Melbourne's suburbs from Cheltenham in the south east to Wyndham Vale in the west. Along its route it will connect with all major railway lines, Monash, Deakin and La Trobe universities, major business and retail hubs at Clayton, Glen Waverley, Box Hill, Heidelberg, Fawkner, Broadmeadows, Sunshine and Werribee, and Melbourne Airport.

It will complement and integrate with the Airport Rail Link and Metro Tunnel as well as the state railway network to

regional Victoria. A number of new stations are envisaged providing Melbourne with improved transport options.

The Government has committed \$300 million for planning and investigation and geotechnical surveys are underway. The entire route will be in tunnel – about 30 km in total – and it is anticipated that construction will commence at the Cheltenham end in 2022. The first stage extending to Box Hill is confirmed.

Three new transport super hubs at Sunshine, Broadmeadows and Clayton will connect regional passengers to the Suburban Rail Loop so that people travelling from the regions won't need to travel through the centre of Melbourne to access jobs in growing economic precincts outside the CBD.

We look forward to further visits to the project as planning and construction proceeds.



News from Regional Roads Victoria (RRV)

Fixing Country Roads Program

As well as maintaining 19,000 km of country roads on the declared roadwork of Victoria, and undertaking upgrade works on them, RRV also manages the \$100 million Fixing Country Roads Program funded by the Victorian Government. This program aims to improve the condition of local roads through grants to rural and regional councils to undertake local road projects beyond regular road maintenance.

The works include projects such as: Fixing Country Roads Program was created to assist councils improve the current state of their local roads to enhance the connectivity, reliability and efficiency of regional communities through projects such as:

- pavement quality improvements including, pavement rehabilitations and sealing of gravel roads;
- reconstructing damaged roads, with priority given to strategic transport links or connections to essential community services;
- bridge improvement works including bridge strengthening/replacement on strategic routes;
- capacity upgrades to promote better traffic flow and journey efficiency and reliability including intersection improvements;
- local road intersection improvements; and
- safety upgrades on local roads.

\$30 million has already been allocated to all 48 rural and regional councils as part of round one. A total of 91 projects are being delivered by councils across the state to improve the local road network.

Some of the 91 projects delivered include the rebuilding of the Murphy Street and Strickland Road roundabout in Bendigo, the rebuilding and widening of Perkins Road at Lara and the reconstruction of Lake Road in Kyabram.

In total, round one will see the following improvements made to the local road network

- 35km of road reconstructed
- 45km of road widened
- 27km of gravel road sealed
- 10 bridges improved
- 20 intersections upgraded

\$70 million will be allocated to all 48 rural and regional councils as part of round two. 133 projects will be delivered by councils across the state in 2019/20 to improve the local road network.

Round two will see benefits to the local road network, including

- 110km of road reconstructed;
- 195km of road widened;
- 65km of gravel road sealed;
- 38 bridges improved;
- 27 intersections upgraded; and
- 8 projects improving walking and cycling.



News from Major Roads Projects Victoria (MRPV)

Mordialloc Freeway Project

MRPV is managing the design and construction of the Mordialloc Freeway project, which includes:

- building bridges over Springvale, Governor, Lower Dandenong and Centre Dandenong Roads, along with new freeway entry and exit ramps
- building bridges over Old Dandenong Road and sensitive waterways area
- connecting the freeway to Dingley Bypass with traffic signals
- upgrading the existing interchange at Thames Promenade, Chelsea, with the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, along with freeway entry and exit ramps
- building a new shared walking and cycling path along the entire freeway.

A Joint Venture between McConnell Dowell and Decmil Joint Venture has been selected as the preferred tenderer for the project. This appointment ensures that feedback from the recent Environment Effects Statement (EES) consultation period can be considered as part of the design refinement process.

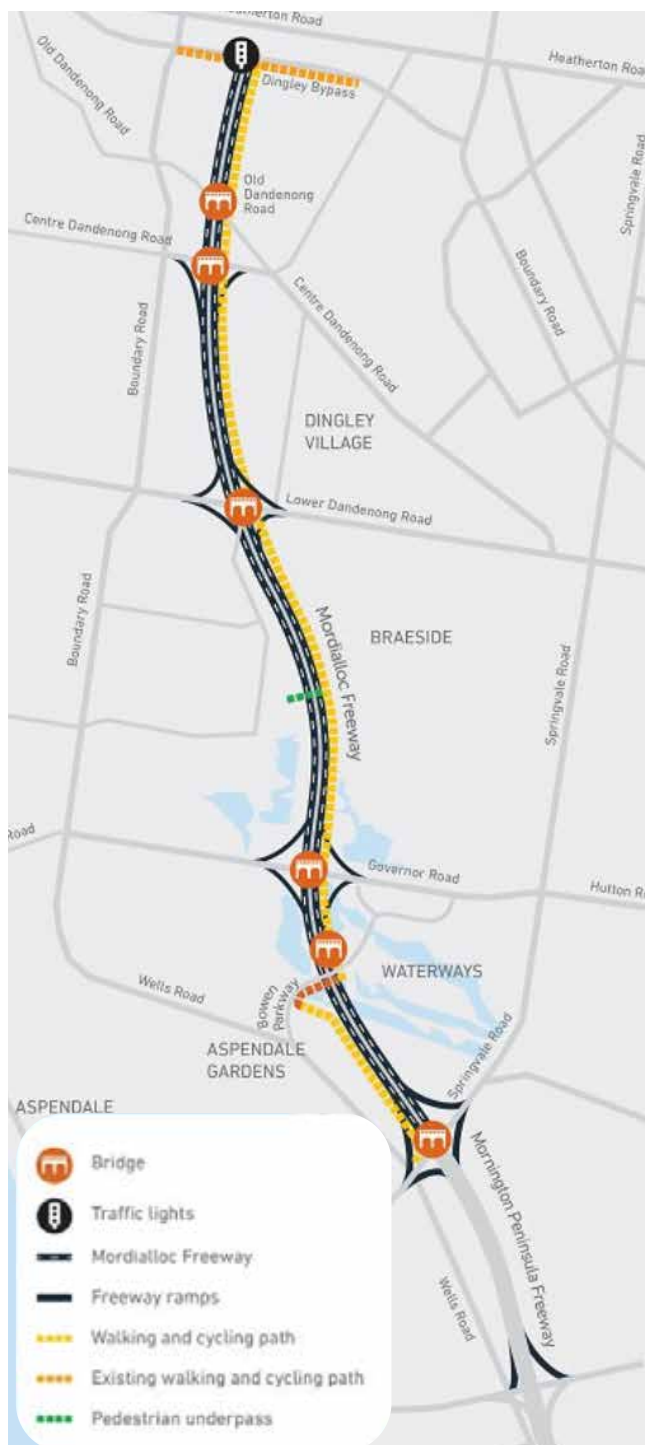
Work is close to starting and will be completed by the end of 2021.

The EES considered the environmental, social, cultural and economic elements of the project along with submissions received during the consultation period and assessed by an Independent Enquiry Panel in the first quarter of 2019.

The Joint Venture will undertake further environmental surveying and monitoring along with non-disruptive site and services investigations. This work will build on the 13 key environmental studies completed in 2018 to ensure the final design aligns with outcomes of the EES process and that the project is built in an environmentally sustainable way.

The 9km freeway will provide an uninterrupted journey from the Mornington Peninsula Freeway in Aspendale Gardens to the Dingley Bypass in Dingley Village. The project is expected to deliver travel time savings of over 10 local roads and improve journey reliability.

Several key environmental design improvements have already been implemented because of EES investigations including new and expanded noise wall locations to mitigate vehicle noise, wildlife underpasses, fauna fencing and twin bridge structures over the Waterways wetlands





From the Archives



The Country Roads Board Annual Staff Ball – August 1935



NAASRA Economics of Road Vehicle Limits Study Team - 1975
Back: Hedley Potter, Lynn Kennedy, Bob Stewart.
Front: Ian Kerr, Jim Webber, Tony Fry (Team Leader), Graham Easton, Jim Stevenson.



Working on the North South Road 1942. Outside the sleeping quarters.
A. Gawith, H. Pollard, H. White, H. George, Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson,
Unknown, F. Docking and 2 Unknown (From H.O.)

NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Lyn and Jeff Briggs

Lyn and Jeff are committee members of VicRoads Association but their love for VicRoads goes beyond a place to work – for their love for each other blossomed on the 5th floor of the Kew building in 1968. This was in the days of the Country Roads Board when Jeff, who worked in Accounts, walked from the South Wing to the North Wing with a pile of documents to be typed. Lyn emerged from the pool of typists to look after Jeff's load, they got chatting and eventually – ever the gentleman – Jeff invited Lyn to the pictures.



He took her to the Burwood Drive In and saw Sydney Poitier in *In the Heat of the Night*. Lyn hastens to add that they saw the whole film! Jeff's devotion saw him travel from Glen Waverley to Box Hill every working day to drive Lyn to Kew and he drove her home every night. They married in 1971 thus saving a fortune in fuel.

Their careers at the Country Roads Board, the Road Construction Authority and VicRoads spanned more than four decades and they made life-long friendships along the way. By the time they retired, Jeff now 74, was Business Support Manager on the 3rd floor at Kew and Lynn, now 68, had become the Executive Assistant to VicRoads CEO David Anderson. Over 38 years their career paths saw them in different suburbs and buildings but at the end, they were only two floors apart. When they retired in 2006, they were the first married couple to retire on the same day. Jeff had clocked up 40 years of service and Lyn 38.

Jeff, who competed in the New York Marathon in 1989, created the CRB Wine Club in 1973 and it is still going strong to this day. Lyn still catches up for a coffee with her friends from the typing pool. As our Prime Minister would say "How good are Jeff and Lyn?"

John Wright's Odyssey (Continued)

This is the last instalment of John's story of life in Papua New Guinea. It has been a roller coaster of adventure and on behalf of all of us I want to congratulate him on his survival.

Leaving Port Moresby

After two years in Port Moresby we were ready to leave. I planned to resign and move back to Melbourne when my leave was due in July 1967 so that I could finalise my studies. In 1965, because we were concerned that I had no written contract, I set about writing to the Firm's Senior Partner, asking him to elaborate on details of matters concerning my entitlement to leave, return air fares to Melbourne and other matters. He was helpful and provided me with written information that would later become very useful to me. In essence, he said that if I took leave every 18 months, then on a pro-rata basis the company would pay our return air fares to Melbourne. I felt confident that we could safely resign on the basis of this information.

However, in early 1967 our situation changed. A recently appointed office manager turned out to be a control freak. One day, when power to the office failed and we were unable to work because of poor light and high humidity, he refused to phone the electricity department because he was convinced it was a general, area-wide power failure. When we suggested it might be a fault at the office, he became very angry because we had challenged his authority. After an hour and a half without power, we were drenched in perspiration and sitting around doing nothing. Finally, he left the office to attend a meeting. We called the electricity people who confirmed that a faulty office power connection was the cause.

Then I discovered a confidential letter from the Firm to the manager, which detailed new and quite punitive conditions for the Port Moresby staff. I was horrified to discover that in the event of a person leaving the Port Moresby office to go to a mainland job outside the Firm, all outstanding leave would only be paid in terms of base salary and would not include the generous zone allowance normally paid. Worse still, the firm would not meet the cost of repatriating the person, their family and their personal effects to the mainland. The fact that the new manager had chosen not to discuss these terms with us was also alarming.

The implications of this were awful. It meant that my original plan to openly resign in Port Moresby and return direct to Melbourne was no longer viable. At best, we could only ask to return to the Brisbane office at the completion of our leave. Against this, there was the very real chance that the manager's growing animosity could see me sacked



in Port Moresby without payment of repatriation expenses or zone allowance on my outstanding leave pay¹.

Although I had planned to take my leave in July that year, the manager demanded I take my leave before the end of April. While this was his prerogative it meant we needed to make an immediate decision about leaving Port Moresby permanently, and none of the options looked very attractive. On even the most optimistic outcome, we would end up in Brisbane after our leave, working with a hostile employer in what was probably going to be a very short-term job². We would need to find new accommodation and would still be faced with the considerable cost of repatriating ourselves back to Melbourne.

Legal advice

With our hearts in our mouths, we consulted a solicitor who confirmed that, because we had no written contract, the firm was quite free to do anything it liked to us, including abandoning us here even if we asked for a transfer back to Brisbane. He said that while the firm's new conditions about stranding us and withholding payment of zone allowance on outstanding leave were quite illegal, the firm could still go ahead and apply them to us. Recovering our rightful entitlements would involve long-winded and expensive court proceedings, which we wouldn't be able to afford.

He then said that having no contract could actually work for us if we were to take pre-emptive action to protect our interests. He strongly recommended we say nothing about resigning from the firm; secretly pack all of our belongings ready for shipment; engage a local shipping company to collect and forward our goods to Melbourne; take our outstanding leave as directed, but request our return air fares in cash; tell nobody that we would not be returning; resign by letter once we were safely in Melbourne and use the value of the return air fares to cover our shipping costs.

He said that the firm would undoubtedly bluster and threaten to sue us, but the shoe would be on the other foot, because without a written contract they would have nothing on which to base a case against us. To this end, he gave us the name of a firm of Melbourne solicitors he trusted to look after us if the firm threatened us. We followed his advice to the letter, and it was well that we did so.

Preparations

The following weeks were enormously stressful. We saw a forwarding agent, without actually identifying ourselves and talked about how our goods might be collected and shipped, and how much this would cost. He confirmed that the shipping cost to Melbourne was the same as that to Brisbane and agreed we could send him a letter from Melbourne containing the door key and an authorisation to collect and ship our goods.

With the exception of our closest friend Allan, we had to ensure that all of our other good friends, and the people at work especially, believed that we were simply going on leave. I convinced the manager that we needed our return airfares in cash so that we could use this money to travel by train between Brisbane and Melbourne and back. He agreed to do this, pleased that I had accepted his authority and was meekly taking my leave as directed. We arranged with the Bank of New South Wales travel people to travel by train from Brisbane to Melbourne and, as a treat, booked the special bedroom on the Southern Aurora between Sydney and Melbourne so that we could enjoy some unaccustomed luxury.

In the remaining days, Alan assisted us in finding cardboard cartons for packing. We snuck them in at night so that nobody would see what we were up to. A few nights before we left, we attended the Car Club's Annual Dinner at the Ela Beach RSL with our closest friends, Kevin and Dianne Hollamby, and it was very hard for us to casually lie to them about our supposed holiday.

Departure

On the morning of our departure, 27 April 1967, I swapped the lock barrels of the front and rear doors, as I knew the manager would at least have the front door key and I didn't want him casually entering and discovering everything was packed before we contacted the agent.

We packed our suitcases and the kids into the car and drove to the airport - hearts in our mouths that the long-suffering big end bearings or the front, transverse spring would not give out on the way. We left the car right outside the terminal and heaved a huge sigh of relief as our plane climbed out over the Coral Sea. We were free.

1 I was also aware that something similar had already happened to Bruce Hamilton, who was retrenched in December 1965, just weeks short of being eligible for reimbursement of his travel costs to Brisbane.

2 My predecessor, who left Port Moresby after barely one year, was retrenched shortly after his return

Finding a job

I felt that I would need to have a job in hand before I officially resigned from the Firm. My brother Geoffrey, who was then working in the City as a public relations consultant for Eric White and Associates, was keen to help and organised an appointment with a friend in an engineering firm in City Road, Melbourne to discuss taking up a position as a draftsman. The friend, who was a manager, asked me what salary I was thinking of and I mentioned my then current PNG salary (around \$4,000 p.a). He laughed and said that even his engineers were only being paid \$3,600 p.a and I could expect to be paid somewhat less than that. This was too low for me and I thanked him for his time. It hadn't occurred to me that, if had been asked, I would have been unable to provide a reference from my previous employer.

A few days later I arranged an interview in the City with Conzinc Riotinto, a large mining company. On my way there I called into Kew to chat to some friends in Plans and Surveys Department. While there, one of the managers, David Hewson³, came over and asked if he could speak to me about a job. When I told him that I was on my way into the city to attend a job interview he said that I didn't need to do that because he could give me a job as a design draftsman in Plans and Survey on the spot – which he did, and I accepted. The CRB interview in the following week was a formality and I was appointed as a Grade 1 Draftsman at a salary of \$3,763 p.a. – a far better pay than that offered by Geoffrey's business contact.

Aftermath

With a secure job in hand, I wrote a resignation letter, citing as our reason for doing so concerns about the health of our children (we said that they had tested positive for Brucellosis – which was true for James, although it only meant that he had been exposed to it). We simultaneously mailed the flat key to our shipping agent in Port Moresby, asking him to ship our goods to Melbourne.

The Firm's reply was offhandedly sympathetic about the children but asked for the immediate return of the zone allowance on my holiday pay and the return half of the airfares (worth about \$4,500 in 2018). There was no mention of funding our removal costs. Shortly afterwards we received a solicitor's letter demanding this amount within seven days under threat of legal action to recover the claimed sum plus costs. My earlier suspicions about the Firm's employment conditions were thus confirmed.

The Melbourne solicitors recommended by our Port Moresby lawyer agreed to represent me and quickly responded to the Firm. They pointed out that the Firm was legally required to pay me the zone allowance on my leave and quoted the senior Partner's letter to me stating I was entitled to household removal costs when I returned to the mainland. A Federal Court ruling about this established that any allowance that formed part of a person's regular weekly wages, was deemed to be part of their normal salary and could not be excluded from leave pay. When the Firm responded that they were only required to pay our removal costs to Brisbane my solicitors pointed out that it would cost the same to ship goods from Port Moresby to Melbourne as it would to Brisbane. The Firm then gave up and settled in full for the difference between the unused airfares and our removal costs - \$17.51. Their costs would have been many times this. Our solicitor's work cost a surprisingly low \$42.51, so we were very pleased with the outcome.

I have often pondered if I could have left the Firm in a more 'honourable' manner because my strong preference for action in all matters is generally to be open and honest with everybody. However, I still believe that any more 'palatable' means of achieving our departure from both Port Moresby and the Firm would have ended very badly for us. Indeed, my actions appeared to have been justified in the early 1970s when I saw notices in Australian Professional Engineers Association newsletters warning engineers to be very wary of the Firm's dodgy overseas pay and conditions.

³ I hardly knew David. However, it seemed that he knew me sufficiently well enough as a draftsman to want me to work for him. Tragically, he was killed in a car accident on the Hume Highway less than a year later.



TRIVIA AND DIDACTIC WHIMSIES

A Scary Religious Experience

Nearly three years ago I travelled to India with other members of the Elgin Artists studio ostensibly to paint. I say ostensibly because – at least for me – most of the time I was a tourist. I wrote this small tale for my family but would you believe I lost it on my I-pad and I have only just resurrected it. I thought it might be worth sharing with you.

‘Yesterday we decided to leave the small town of Pushkar in Rajasthan for a day trip to the larger city of Ajmer – only eleven kilometres away but it takes about three quarters of an hour to drive there. The roads in India break this engineer’s heart and the driving behaviour is even more terrifying. I’ve known this for many years but my advancing age has made me think more keenly about mortality.

Pushkar is a small town renowned as a Hindu holy city. It has about 20,000 people living around a small and picturesque lake. No alcohol or meat is allowed to be consumed here although we found a restaurant back from the lake which serves cans of beer wrapped in paper napkins and sophisticated cocktails such as Sex on the Beach and Bloody Mary - but not wine.

Gandhi’s ashes were strewn on this lake and it is one of the holiest sites in Hinduism. Because of this it attracts many tourists and especially western hippies seeking some sort of meaning to their moral compass. They dress like the locals, play Indian musical instruments and steep themselves in their rituals. However, by Indian standards Pushkar is quiet but we have found it difficult to sleep because of the noises of India - dogs and monkeys fighting, music blaring, firecrackers exploding, Muslim calls to prayer and, worst of all, the hotel’s method for keeping the pigeons at bay - a cannon-like explosion every now and then throughout the night. The first time I heard this I thought that Pakistan was invading.

As I write this sitting on the veranda of the hotel by the lake I can clearly hear the voices of the people on the other side about 200 metres away.

Ajmer has about a half million people living in total chaos. It too has a lake but it is an important religious centre for the Muslim community. It is the centre of Islam in Rajasthan (the most populous Islamic state in India) and is India’s prime Muslim pilgrimage site. Pilgrims and Sufis come from all over the world on the anniversary of the death of the Sufi saint - Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti who came to India from Persia and died in Ajmer in 1236.

As we have a small bus at our disposal, we decided to go over to Ajmer to explore the city. Because Ajmer is so bustling and the streets are so narrow, the bus could only deliver us to the outskirts of the city. We were a party of eleven and we engaged two six-seater tuk tuks to take us

into town, wait for us, and then deliver us back to the bus three hours later. The drivers understood our needs well. The first stop was at a public toilet where there were no familiar plumbing fixtures. The attendant turned on the tap and provided a paper napkin for a tip ranging between 20 cents or a dollar depending on the notes you had in your wallet.

We then visited the Jain temple where there was a huge model showing Jain beliefs. This covered an area of about 12 metres by 25 metres and was two storeys high. It was painted in brilliant gold and it told the stories of the past in much the same way as a medieval cathedral does in Europe. The Jains do not believe in a creator - the earth has always been here - and the earth is a flat disc inhabited by earthly and celestial beings. Jain pilgrims were here, dressed in immaculate white and in the happiest of spirits. They wanted to be in photographs with us and it was uplifting to be with them.

From here, we drove in to the Delhi Gate at the entrance to the bazaar leading to the mosque known as the Dargah of Khwaja. On the way in our driver nearly collided with 127 pedestrians, 89 cows, 73 other tuk tuks, 168 motor bikes and 23 fixed objects by the road. The two tuk tuks treated it as a race despite our pleas for temperance but they could only take us to the entrance to the bazaar because it was a seething mass of people impossible to penetrate with a vehicle - or at least that was what we thought. We arranged to meet the drivers later and then we plunged into the melee.

The bazaar was a narrow street about five hundred metres long. It was lined with shops and stalls and we were



Pushkar. The sight from our hotel veranda.



(Left) Some of the Jain Pilgrims and the model of the Jain world (Right) Depiction of Mount Sumeru considered by the Jains to be the centre of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes.

harassed all the way by beggars and touts. We were the only westerners there and we caused quite a commotion. The beggars were the worst I had seen - terribly deformed and rolling around in the filth on the ground. Others walked beside you touching your arm and asking for money. Actually I was tempted to give some but I would have then been inundated. Better to steer clear. And through all this crush of people, motor bikes, tuk tuks and some cars - all tooting their horns to let you know they were there - forced their way through. But I did not see one argument. Everyone serenely went on their way oblivious to what was going on around them.

When we reached the entrance to the main gate of the Dargah I made my first mistake. People were pushing in every direction and I could see that they were taking off their shoes. I leant forward and put my foot on the second step. I still found, 6 weeks after my hip replacement, difficulty in bending down to take my shoes off. As soon

as I did this I was given a mighty shove by a man in military uniform with a stick and he barked something at me and I soon came to realise that you couldn't put a shoe or sandal on the steps. It was bare feet or no entry. My fellow travellers were in similar states of ignorance - one had even walked up the flight - when an immaculately dressed man in Muslim white approached us with good English and asked us to follow him. We all knew that he was 'on the make' but under the circumstances we had no other option.

He took us to another gate where there were fewer people and he briefed us on the etiquette on entering the grounds of the mosque. There were to be no large handbags, no cameras, no shoes, and heads had to be covered. The men in the group could wear sun hats and there were white handkerchiefs for sale for the women who didn't have a scarf or hat. He went to great pains to lecture us on these points and said we would likely be searched but he said we could take photographs using our phones except in the



inner temple containing the memorial to the Sufi saint. Sufi incidentally is the name given to a Muslim mystic. He took the bags and cameras to the cloakroom with much gravity and we were never searched.

We entered the general area of the mosque through a schoolroom where small boys were learning the Koran. They sat cross-legged on the floor swaying as they recited the text. At the back of the room was a teacher who appeared to be interviewing a father and son - probably about the boy's entry into the school. Although they were intent on their tasks, they were nonetheless curious as all small boys in India are at seeing a ragtag group of elderly Australians. They were wide-eyed and one gave me a dazzling smile. I don't think they see too many travellers in Ajmer.

We then entered an open area which had smaller, fenced off areas where groups of pilgrims were seated on carpets. Many of these were family groups all of whom had brought circular rattan trays of red rose petals. They were using their mobile devices just like everyone on the Number 70 tram to Docklands. In that respect they were no different to us. Our guide remonstrated with me because my feet were pointing towards the inner temple. Little did he know the struggle I had to get to the floor let alone point my feet in the right direction. A man with red hair dyed with henna walked through the seated pilgrims (including us) distributing sweets. Our guide suggested we shouldn't take them if we were diabetic. He gave a talk on what we were to see in the central part of the mosque where the saint is buried. I confess I could not hear him too well and I was distracted by all the things going on around me. He used old-fashioned, flowery language and was at great pains to reassure us about everything. At one stage he told me that he could see some of his friends who were very impressed that he was with a group of foreigners

The time then came to enter the inner sanctum. Our guide recommended that a few remain behind to look after of our

possessions not impounded in the cloak room and warned us to be aware of our pockets but not to be paranoid about it. Those we left behind could go in after we returned. We entered into an outer room with crowd control barriers to assist in queueing up to the very small entrance. There was no door. I should have put queueing in inverted commas because it was quite clear that these pilgrims knew nothing about the principles of queueing. They were balancing the trays of rose petals on their heads and rushing at the door in a cacophony of screams and entreaties. It was total mayhem. A tall man stood by the door with a long switch of what looked like peacock feathers and was hitting out at people and demanding money. Some gave and others didn't and I decided to join the latter group and so he kept hitting out at me. There were eight of us in the group and at last our guide was able to stem the flow enough to enable us to enter. The door was only wide enough for one person and I had to stoop quite low to get in.

Once inside we were immediately overwhelmed by the crush of people crazily trying to get near the tomb in the middle of the room to spread their petals. It was impossible to move. I immediately started to sweat and my first concern was to look for the less able people in our group who were being swallowed up in the melee. People kept pressing through the door and the heat, noise and crush was frightening. Men, women and children of all ages. I have never experienced such a crush before and although I was not panic-stricken, my immediate thought was we have to get out of here as quick as possible before it became more dangerous. I could see that some of our group were highly distressed and extremely anxious.

The room was about six metres wide and 10 metres long and as far as I could see there was only the one entrance. The tomb must have had a stout cage around it to prevent people being pushed on to it. I never saw it. There were hundreds of people in the room all pushing towards the centre and throwing the petals across the heads of those at the front. I kept thinking of the crushes that occur in



The bazaar on a very quiet day with the Dargah in the distance. Photograph taken from the internet.



The Dargah Sharif, Ajmer, 1893.



The outer sanctum of the Dargah where we were marshalled before entering the building inside which was the tomb of the Sufi saint.



Mecca during the Haj where hundreds of people are killed and I thought this is what it must be like. It needed only one person to fall down and there was no way they could be retrieved. And to take small children in there was the height of irresponsibility but still the throng came crashing through the door. We all thought as one that the best thing was to beat a hasty retreat. Our guide was somewhat shaken by it as he kept apologising for what had happened. It took all of my strength to force my way back to the door with the others in tow. I had to fight against the tide of humanity forcing their way in and, once outside, I had to protect the entrance to enable my companions to emerge – and even then I missed some of them.

Those of our group who stayed behind had no interest in trying it after our experience. They said we all looked grey. I said earlier, I was not panic-stricken but that is probably not quite true. I was in fear of human life, not my own, and it certainly was one of the most dangerous experiences I have encountered. It is impossible to describe the sensation. I felt so helpless.

Leaving the mosque and the bazaar was the same struggle as getting there but four of us - including me - took a tuk tuk back to the Delhi Gate where our next tuk tuks would take us to the bus. I sat next to the driver. Luckily it was a fairly straight run. If he had to take a sharp left hand turn his handle bar would most likely have caused me to cancel my next appointment with the urologist. People laugh about these sorts of experiences but it disgusted me the way he drove through the throng of pedestrians. We made it safely - only half a kilometre or so. There must be hundreds of Indians die or are seriously injured each day through this irresponsible attitude towards driving. And it doesn't only apply to the tuk tuk drivers. The motorcyclists are worse and India's new found prosperity means that the size of the motorcycle fleet is increasing inevitably leading to more death and injury on the road. I can't see this culture changing in the foreseeable future.

At the Delhi Gate there was no sign of our tuk tuks. However after a few minutes one of our drivers emerged and lead us down a narrow lane where they had parked. Then followed the frenzied dash back to our bus which was like an oasis in the desert. By the time we got home we were all exhausted and somewhat stunned by what we had witnessed. The fact that Pushkar is a dry city didn't deter us from a stiff drink in our room where we all shared the experience of the day.

Our guide struck a beatific pose when he left us at the mosque. He said that he did not expect to be paid – only an amount that we thought was appropriate and he held out his hand and looked disdainfully at our offerings. He said he would very much like to come to Australia to see our lovely country. He told us that he had visited France once and stayed with a beautiful family he met at the mosque who were so good to him when they paid for his airfare home after he lost his ticket!

Politically incorrect but very funny

I worried for a long time whether I should include these images – but they were so funny to me I decided to include them. I hope I have not caused any offence.



So... you say you're the Prime Minister and you live at 10 Downing Street. Is there a relative or carer that I can phone to come and collect you?
(no point ringing his brother)



Nothing is made in America anymore. I just bought a TV says "Built in antenna." I don't even know where that is.

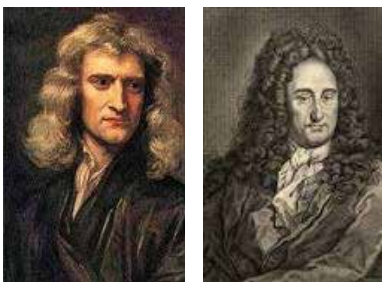
When Scientists Do Battle

Isaac Newton (b. 1643), is arguably the most influential scientist of all time. He was a lecturer at Cambridge but a terrible teacher and he often delivered lectures to an empty room. This worried him not in the least and he spent most of his time as an alchemist, and wrote more about religion than science.

When he first demonstrated the use of calculus, he was so offhand that no one took any notice of him, and he didn't bother explaining it for another 20 years. By the time he published his findings 30 years later, another scientist, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, had widely published his own system in Germany. Each acknowledged the other's work but an acrimonious debate developed between them.

The English-speaking community supported Newton, but Leibniz was supported on the Continent – although there was a whiff of a smell of foul play when it was found that Leibniz had doctored some of his documentation to support his claim.

Modern historians now agree that they most likely came to calculus independently around the same time.



Newton and Leibniz

A Few Stories

The wrong feet

A first year kid goes to school with his shoes on the wrong feet.

"Johnny", says the teacher, "you have your shoes on the wrong feet"

The kid looks up puzzled "But Miss, these are the only feet I have"

Secret of life

A tough old cowboy once counselled his grandson that if he wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a pinch of gunpowder on his oatmeal every morning. The grandson did this religiously and lived to the age of 110. He left 4 children, 20 grand-children, 30 great-grandchildren, 10 great-great-grand-children and a twenty-metre hole where the crematorium used to be.

Tree fellers wanted

A Canadian lumber camp advertises for a lumberjack. A skinny little guy shows up at the camp the next day carrying an axe.

The head lumberjack takes one look at the puny little guy and tells him to get lost.

"Give me a chance to show you what I can do," says the skinny guy.

"Okay, see that giant redwood over there?" says the head lumberjack. "Take your axe and cut it down."

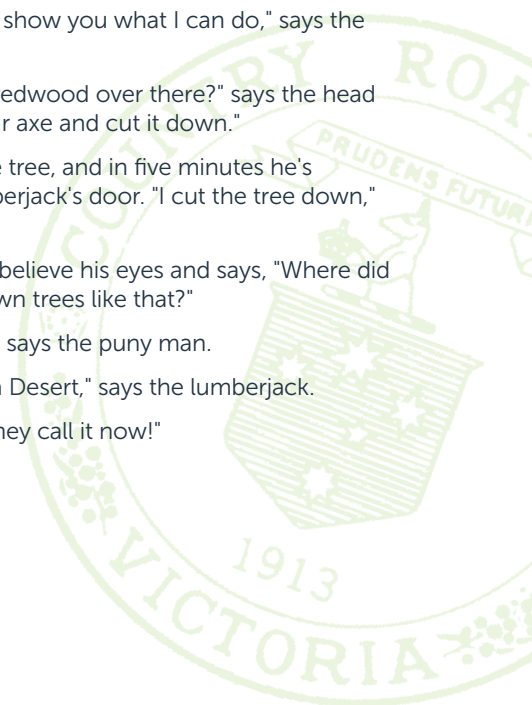
The guy heads for the tree, and in five minutes he's knocking on the lumberjack's door. "I cut the tree down," says the guy.

The lumberjack can't believe his eyes and says, "Where did you learn to chop down trees like that?"

"In the Sahara Forest," says the puny man.

"You mean the Sahara Desert," says the lumberjack.

"Sure.....That's what they call it now!"



Iris Whittaker
For Jim Webber
Secretary VicRoads Association
c/o Natalia Morgan
60 Denmark Street
Kew, Vic 3101

Please complete and return to the Secretary by Wednesday 27th November 2019

Christmas Luncheon

Monday 2nd December 2019 at 12 Noon

I will be attending, accompanied by:

.....
(Please print)

Member's name:

.....
(Please print)

Special dietary requirements, if any:

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$.....

or direct bank transfers should be made to VicRoads Association BSB 083323, Account Number 170934017 and you should include your name as a reference

(The price is \$50.00 per person)