

Hello all,

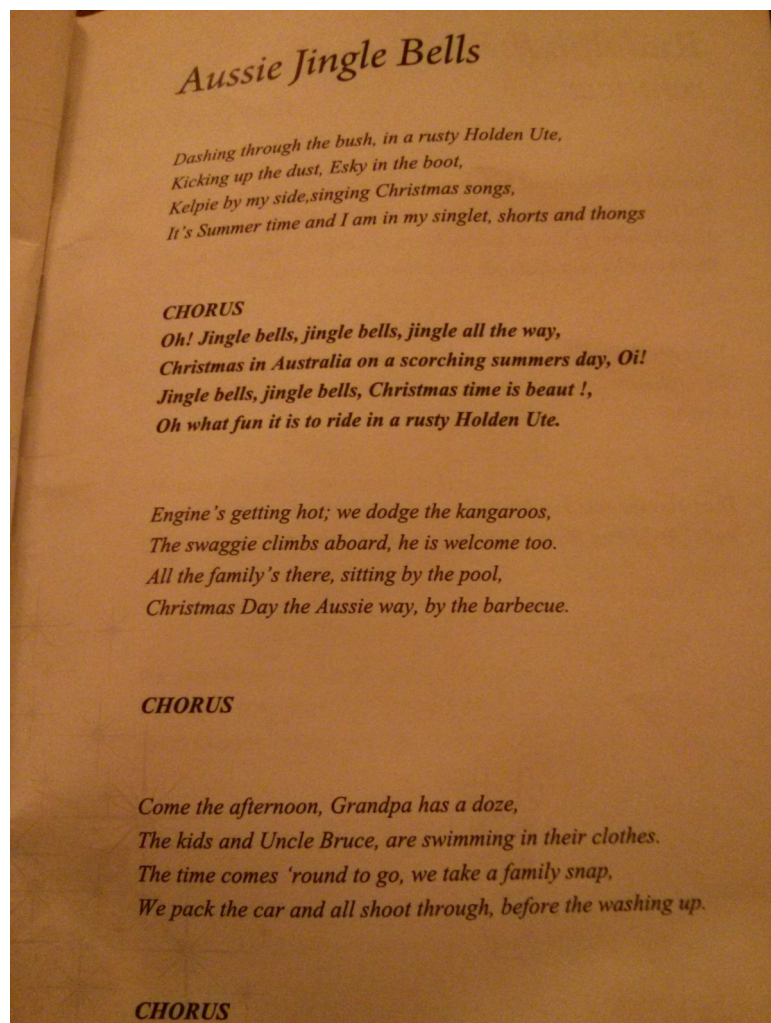
Hope you are well, not drowning or too cold (believe you are having a cold snap). Steph gets to start the next catch up as Derek is busy trying to demonstrate his mobile development skills – more later.

We last left you just before we went away to the Melbourne area for Christmas and New Year.

Our trip to started at 4am!! It was really odd to be international travellers again! And two weeks off. We drove the Great Ocean Road – stopping to walk. We stayed in a little town that was having its “Carols by Candlelight”. We brought a picnic and joined in. The

local kids dance troop (whom had to come out twice as somebody was late, so they had to do it all again).

It never got to dark for the candles but we got a couple of great Australian carols – one about Santa using big white boomers (a large kangaroo) to drive his sleigh. It was mildly



Christmasy.

All the Australian animals are just easy to find. We watched a Koala for 20 minutes and said hello to emus. I saw kangaroos in the distance and we saw some mega birds.

We then headed back to Melbourne for Christmas Eve and they are quite into Christmas, a gingerbread village and modern art Christmas House. Simon and Katie, who Derek worked with in Xero Wellington

have moved to Xero Melbourne on their way back to the UK. It could take some time!! They kindly invited us for a BBQ on Christmas Day, with Simon's family over from the UK. We had a steamy walk around the area before heading back to our lovely apartment, with a Jacuzzi. It was great to catch up with them.

We had an excellent two days at the cricket - England only lost when stopped going to see them. We became Guinness



Book of World Record holders by being part of the biggest cricket crowd ever. Oddly enough it actually felt smaller than the crowds in India, perhaps as we got in and out of the ground so easily.

Then we had a day running around doing all the museums and culture we could fit in a day, in Melbourne. We did the immigration museum, the aquarium and the Australian Modern Art Gallery. The best bit of the day was the penguins – the staff were playing them classical music and blowing them bubbles. There were a group of ladies whom had decorated whole rooms by icing in one art gallery – so



the pictures and rugs were all piped icing, the smell was so sweet but they were fascinating to look at.

We then headed off to the Yarra Valley - a beautiful wine making region. We went to an animal sanctuary - to see all the very cute animals. Koalas with their young, very sleepy kangaroos and some great talks on platypus and Tasmanian Devils. We watched



animals for 4 hours - they were very cute.

We headed straight back to Melbourne of New Years Eve, as it has fab fireworks. We spent the evening walking around Melbourne.



I did think – in my T shirt and shorts – how do they do this in Edinburgh!. We started with the local childrens fire-works, after the big screen Muppet Movie – 9.30 when it



had just gone dark. We were right by these fireworks and they were great. There were plenty of people but you could still walk around.

We walked 12km and ended up nearer our apartment. It was busier here and we wanted to be able to get home after the main event – which we were not sure where it was going to be. Then they all started at the same time but of loads of tall buildings. Very clever as wherever you were in the city you would have been able to see them. They were perfectly timed. We were so glad we had come back into town to see them as they were thrilling. The city was clearly split into mainly alcohol free areas, with small “ticket only” corals for those whom wanted to drink.

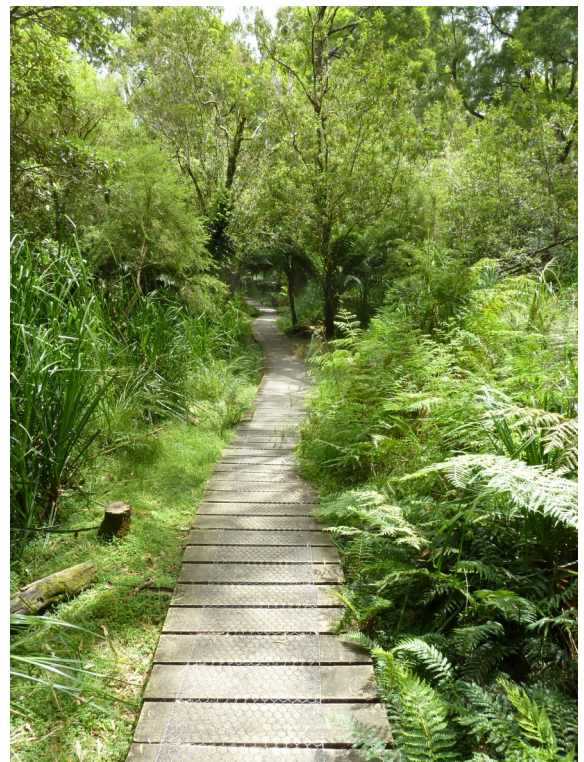
The next day it rained, hard. We had variable weather throughout but this was the only truly wet day and we had planned to do our January Sale shopping. You cannot im-

agine how exciting this was. One outlet mall, 6 hours of shopping and we did not even get a repeat of a shop. We got bargains – shoes of course were our biggest thrill. In New Zealand we get very little choice and poor quality. We did not make it to the Ikea!! We then headed out of the city towards Wilson's Promontory. It had been hard to get accommodation down here as it is now big family holiday time.

We walked Sealers Cove in Wilson Prom - 18km. The walk was stunning and had lots of signs telling us where they had repaired bits from the flood in March 2011 - lots of signs.

While we were waiting for the bus back down a man told us that the park has been half closed since that flood and the walk we went on only opened this year. People had to be helicoptered out as it washed the bridge away. I am so pleased it is now open - stunner of a walk. The last 1.5km was on boardwalk - over a swamp - stunning.

Then it was time to head home, but on the way back we could stop and look at the 300 tonnes of sand they had shipped in to make giant sand castles – well Hogwarts and

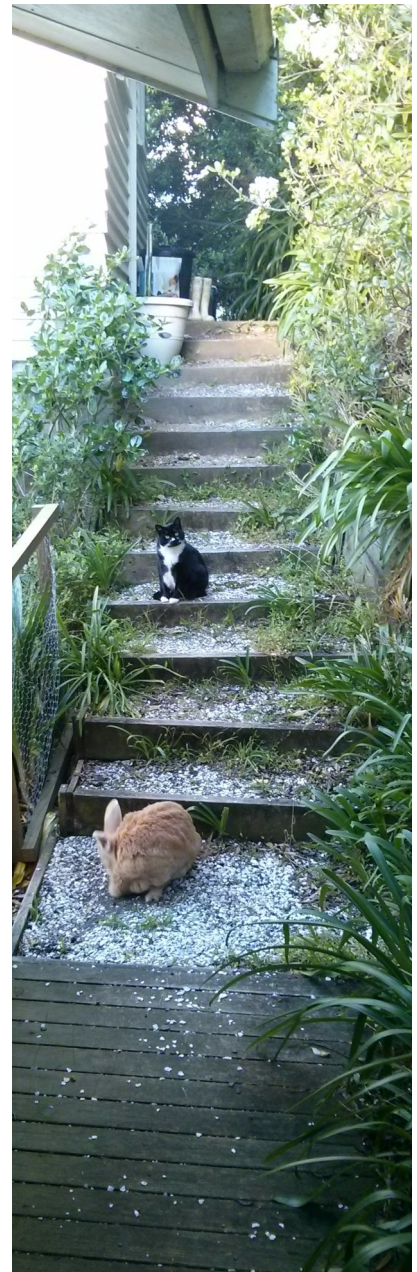


to tower of Mister Men!
They were great. One of the things we learnt in Australia was that they can make anything into an expensive tourist attraction – this had included a view from a cafe where you had to pay \$10Aus to get into the car park. They are also very straight talking, you would get a ticket for doing 101kmph in a 100km zone! They did not call them car parks – they were “power nap zones”.

Getting back to New Zealand was tough – with a five day week BUT then easy, as Ed was over from the UK and we had two four day weekends. We met him with summer weather in Martinborough, fantastic day walking around the wineries, stopping to try wines one the way.



31/1/14 – tonight, when I started the missive I had taken Derek out on a date. Wonderful summer evening, he had to get on his bike to cycle to our local Polish restaurant. We then had a wonderful meal and planned what we needed to get done to get to the UK. There is just so much paperwork!! I need to prove when I had my MMR vaccinations or get a blood test to prove I had them! I have to have New Zealand and UK police check!! Derek has to find a new project to work on in Xero, for when he gets back – hence doing mobile applications AND find a job in the UK! Then we cycled back in the dark – with all the stars out. I started the missive as the house two down are having a party – the first this load since we moved in, just under a year ago.



I am a bit slow of finishing the missive so we are now in Feb and Derek has added the photos on a wet Sunday.

We would like to thank the person/s who sent the Children in Need Calendar—it arrived the day before I was going to buy a 2nd calendar—but did not say whom it was from.

Lots of love Steph and Derek