

December 2023

Dear family and friends,

We hope you are safe and well, and finding joy and contentment in life. Our hearts go out to those who are struggling across the world due to war, natural disasters or other difficult circumstances, especially at this time of the year.

2023 brought some big changes for us, in particular moving from Perth, WA to Newcastle, New South Wales (NSW). In January, Stephen was busy writing an ARC grant proposal -- after 10 years of grant support an unsuccessful application was overdue. February and March were consumed with packing, cleaning, and donating things that we decided not bring to with us. Much more enjoyable were the multiple farewell gatherings with our many dear Perth friends. As usual, it was hard to leave despite looking forward to new adventures and rekindling old friendships in NSW.

After "shipping" (by truck) a number of boxes of clothes, kitchenware, paintings, books ... and a bicycle (which S calls Luke's bike), we drove the trusty Toyota Corolla east for it's 7th camping trip across the Nullarbor. We arrived in Sydney in early April after stopping to see friends near the Snowy Mountains and in Canberra. As our tenants in Newcastle had not yet moved out, we stayed with Stephen's mother for an extended time. It was wonderful to catch up and help with chores as needed. We also stayed with S's brother Tim & family in Newcastle and our good friends Coral & David -- we're very appreciative of everyone's generosity. We took the opportunity to explore parts of NSW that we hadn't seen in years. Then in July, we flew to Tasmania to help our friend Peter drive his car back to Sydney. The beautiful alpine bogs and heath landscapes are very different from WA!

We were finally able to move into our house in late July. After several weeks of intense cleaning, we started the big job of painting the ceilings and walls, and then had the wooden floors sanded and refinished. We also bought beds, mattresses, a refrigerator, table, chairs, ... to prepare for the arrival of our first visitors -- Carin and Steffen from Ellensburg (USA). We travelled with them to the Warrumbungles Nat Pk in central NSW, and Dorrigo Nat Pk, and also squeezed in a side trip to Brisbane, Queensland to see S's relatives and to celebrate his uncle Peter's 77th birthday. Then we drove to Newcastle to regroup for another trip with Carin & Steffen, this time south to the Blue Mountains, Capertee Nat Pk (where we were the only visitors besides some scientists!), and Canberra. We saw an astounding amount of wildlife including bandicoots, wombats, echidnas, koalas, endangered Regent Honeyeaters, goannas, pademelons, wallabys, and many beautiful birds and reptiles. In Canberra, we also visited the amazing National Gallery and National Museum.

One of Marie's newer volunteer activities is with the Australian Coastal Society, and as part of that she attended a large conference which was held in Newcastle in early November. It was a great opportunity to catch up with some people after many years away and to learn about recent coastal research developments in NSW.

Later in November, we drove to Melbourne, and then Sydney, for two Mathematics conferences (and to see good friends). Then we returned to Newcastle to host a family gathering to celebrate Mary's 88th birthday. It is wonderful to be closer to family, and especially to see more of Mary and her partner Robert, S's brothers, their partners, nieces and nephews. In December, we had several more sets of visitors, from the US and Perth, and then some of S's family stayed with us over the Christmas holidays which S's brother Tim and wife Anna hosted at their house (they live 10 minutes from us in Newcastle!). More Perth friends will visit us in early January and in April we'll travel to the US, so 2024 is likely to be another busy year...

Thank you to those who have stayed in touch despite not hearing much from us during this disrupted year. We feel fortunate to have so many special friends around the world and look forward to hearing news from you. We're sending our love and hoping for a more peaceful 2024.

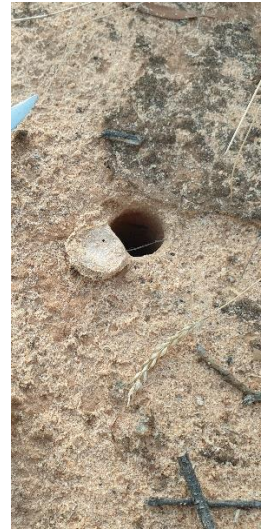
Wishing you all the best, Marie and Stephen

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A few memorable photos from 2023



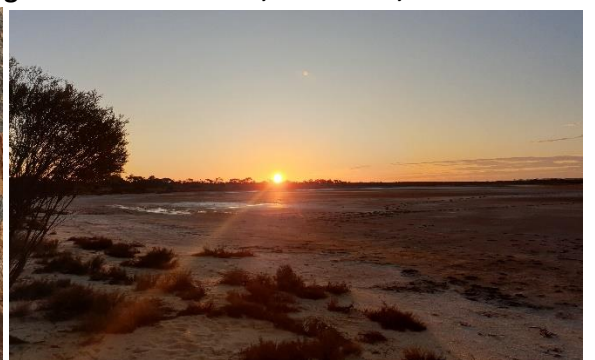
Time to drive east and say goodbye to WA's red earth, ancient rocks, amazing flowering gum trees and blue sky



Stephen thinking of our Perth friends (Koonalda Station, now a heritage site) Nullarbor Plain; Trapdoor spider hole



Beautifully patterned giant Ghost moths, in NSW; wishful thinking and outback humor, Pooncarie, NSW



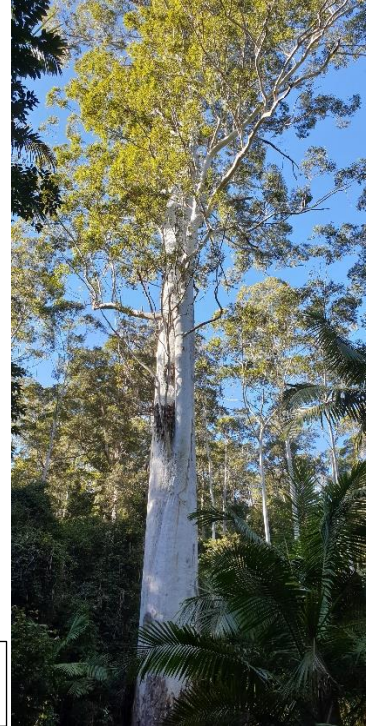
South Australia: artistic photos around Tcharkuldu Rock; sunset at Lake Gillies – a dry lake bed with salt deposits



First Mother's Day together in years! Mary, Chris, Stephen and Tim; us at the Vivid light festival in Sydney



A spot where we saw many pods of whales migrating northward in June and even heard some singing!



Newcastle region: temperate rainforest with ferns; Blue-faced honeyeater on a Coral Tree; Sugarloaf Point Lighthouse near Seal Rocks; 400 year old huge Flooded Gum tree (76 m/250 ft tall, 11.5 m/38 ft circumference at base)



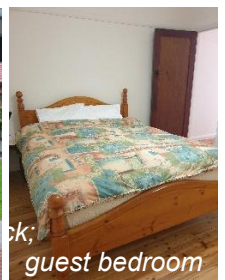
Tasmanian snow gum; heath plants & lichens near Hartz Pass; padymelon (a small marsupial) south of Hobart



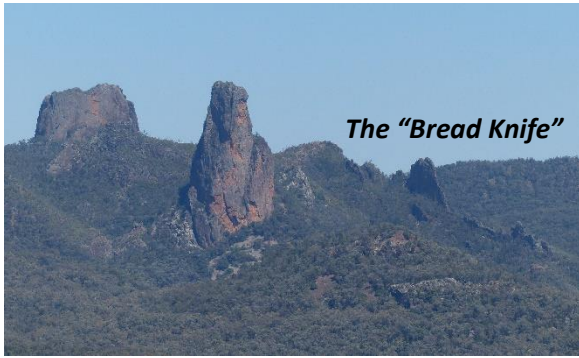
Our house



Dining/living room looking toward back; verandah and part of back garden;



guest bedroom



The "Bread Knife"



Volcanic necks of Warrumbungles Nat Pk; Waratah (NSW state flower and name of our suburb); Yellow Robin



Dense rainforest vegetation in Dorrig Nat Pk, northern NSW; Rainbow Lorikeet getting nectar from flower spike



Stephen next to his Uncle Peter and Queensland cousins, many of whom he hadn't seen in decades! early Oct 2023



Stephen with Merren & Mark, HS friends from Sydney; bushfire smoke creating an eerie sky and sun halo at 3pm, seen while visiting friends Peter and Renee in northern NSW (a scary reminder for them of past nearby bushfires)

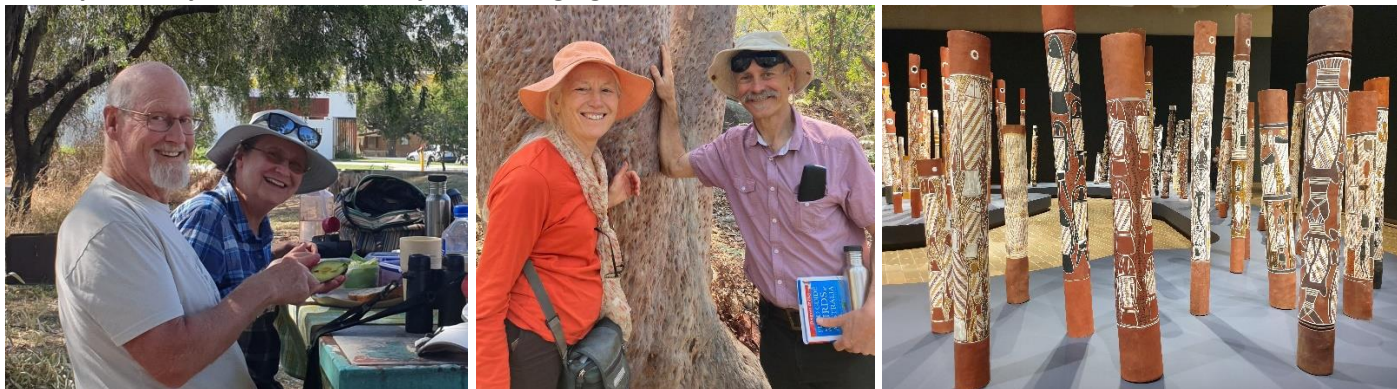
Being back in eastern Australia has given us opportunities to see some iconic animals and birds, and big trees



Lace monitor (goanna) and wombat at Captertee Nat Pk, central NSW; Superb Fairy Wren



Swamp Wallaby, 5-month old baby Koala clinging to its 'mum', and Bandicoot at Tidbinbilla Reserve near Canberra



Steffen & Carin on one of our picnics; us on a bushwalk; Aboriginal Memorial at National Gallery (Canberra) – 200 hollow log ceremonial coffins from Northern Territory created in 1988 in response to Bicentenary – sad & striking



Perth friends Betty & Ursula at beautiful Port Stephens (near our home); largest Red Bloodwood tree anywhere (3 people didn't even reach 1/3 of way around it, 16 m at base!); coast & beach near Port Macquarie, central NSW