

Dear family and friends,

December 2022

We hope that you are safe and well as 2022 ends – sadly, so many people are not, which concerns us a great deal. This year saw a change of government in Australia, and small steps are being made to solve very big problems: more renewable energy, improved environmental regulation, less corruption in government, and hopefully Aboriginal Constitutional recognition. The US has had both good and worrying political developments, so the future is much less clear (to us). We hope that Australia and the US become more just and caring societies, and that there is some relief and steps toward peace in Ukraine.

As we look back, January and early February were spent visiting and chatting/Zooming with local and distant friends and family, seeing the occasional movie or gallery exhibit, as well as doing paid and volunteer work ;-). We also enjoyed several WA Ballet and world music performances. We feel fortunate to have easy access to these, and appreciate the very special environment in which we live.

For us the pandemic entered a new phase because we were able to travel both interstate and internationally! In mid-February we headed to Sydney to see Mary (Stephen's Mum) whose previous back operation (unfortunately) did not resolve her chronic back pain. We drove 4,000 km (2500 miles) in 5 days, making almost no stops in hopes that we would arrive Covid-free (it worked). It was really wonderful to see Mary, her partner Robert, S's brothers Chris and Tim, their partners and 2 nieces and 2 nephews. It rained most days, primarily due to La Niña (back-to-back events for last 3 years), which produced record-breaking floods in many parts of eastern Australia. Despite the rain, we had great visits with Stephen's family in Sydney and Newcastle, and also caught up with a few old University friends which was a bonus.



(LEFT) Back: Carolina, Karina, Chris, Ivan, Olivia, Robert, Marie;  
Front: Sasha, Anna, Mary, Tim, Stephen

(BELOW) Back: Tim, Sami, Jackson  
Front: Marie, Sasha, Karina, Anna, Tim

Bottom: Stephen with Uni friend Peter;  
Stephen and Neil walking through the replanted orchard (2.5 years after devastating bushfire), and newly finished house



Peter and Stephen, Canberra

Stephen and Neil, Tumbarumba (6 hours southwest of Sydney)





Our return drive back to Perth was less rushed and we saw dear friends in Canberra and Tumbarumba, before meeting up with Melbourne friends to camp and hike in the Grampians National Park in Victoria. We re-realized that, despite having seen a lot of Australia, there is still so much to explore! We visited Mt Remarkable National Park, which is one of our favorite stops because the campsites are set among the majestic river gums. One of our standout camp sites was on the Nullabor Plain. Most places have vertical cliffs (40-100m high), but we found a spot to camp where it was possible to walk down a long slope (rather than abseil down the cliff!) to a remote beach and look out to Antarctica – well... it was in the distance! We found a complete skull near the beach which an expert later told us was a New Zealand Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) or an Australian Sea-lion (*Neophoca cinerea*). That evening the stars were very bright against the dark sky. We also saw a trail of 30 closely-spaced lights in a line, which we later learned were Starlink satellites deployed from a recent SpaceX launch; definitely a magical camping experience. Our last night of camping was at Burra Rock, near Kalgoorlie. WA's huge granite monoliths were used by farmers to collect water – they built low walls at the base of the rock to trap the rainwater in pools (*at right side of photo*). The large egg-shaped granite boulder on top of the much larger Burra Rock is ~3.5 x 2.5 m (~10 x 7 ft). The 'roundness' is natural, due to long-term weathering over 2.65 billion years!



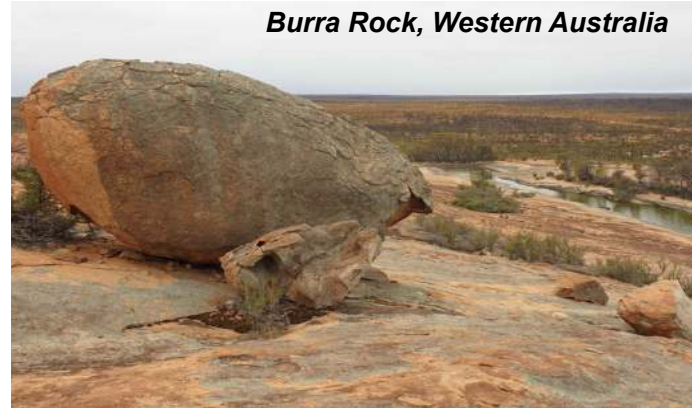
**Grampians Nat Park, Victoria**



**Mt Remarkable Nat Park, South Australia**



**South Australian coast near border with Western Australia**



**Burra Rock, Western Australia**

April to September mainly comprised work for both of us, although we also had several great visits and dinners with friends. Stephen's niece, Karina, came to Perth for a conference in June – she stayed with us overnight and we showed her some Perth sites. In August we enjoyed having dinner with the Cant family (who we met in Ellensburg 20 years ago!) when they visited family. Greg is President of Wilkes University (in Penn.) and recently hosted US president Joe Biden who visited the university to emphasize the urgent need for gun control (we don't know many people who have a selfie with Joe!). Their daughter Eliza studied at Murdoch University in Perth this past semester, so we've done some fun things with her during the last few months, including visiting the amazing *Dinosaurs of Patagonia* exhibit at the WA Museum. We also managed to see many beautiful spring wildflowers at parks in and around Perth.

Besides travelling, Stephen has written (many) papers, attended and spoke at conferences (Zoom talks are less exciting, but have a lower carbon footprint than flying to the northern hemisphere), and co-supervised a German PhD student (who has finished!). He also attended a research retreat in February near Perth which resulted in two papers, including a longer paper that was completed when a colleague, Heiko from Melbourne, visited him in April. They will jointly submit a research grant proposal early in 2023.

Marie has been busy writing (more) submissions to State and Federal governments arguing for better environmental protection, less logging of Australian native forests (a major cause of species extinction here), and the preservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage. In August she gave a series of lectures on the geology of some national parks in Western Australia to a mature-aged (and very appreciative) audience.



We were *finally* able to travel to the US and spent October visiting Marie's family, staying mostly with Claire (sister who lives south of Boston) and other siblings visited us there. We got together for a reunion, originally planned for Mom's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday – at a large (rented) house in Sandwich (Cape Cod, Mass). It was wonderful to be together with Marie's brothers and sisters, catching up on life and news during long walks to/at the beach, while cooking, eating, or kayaking in the nearby saltmarsh creeks. We also visited Aunts Annette and Margie (in their early 90s), quite a few cousins, and some friends who live in eastern Massachusetts (sadly there is never enough time to see everyone). We even managed to catch up with Sydney University friends who we hadn't seen in 30 years – a fluke that they were in Boston when we were! We also rented a car and drove to New Hampshire to see sisters Theresa and Jeanne and really enjoyed the campfires, walks and beautiful autumn leaves (despite M suffering from an extremely nasty poison ivy skin rash). Luckily, the wonderful memories of the visit are stronger than those of the rash!



***Jeanne (standing); Fran & Michael (back); Louise & Tom, Claire, Theresa, Marie & Stephen***



***Jeanne, Theresa & Stephen: Singing in the Rain!***



***Aunts Annette and Margie***



***Claire & Marie***



***Autumn trees during walk in park with Trisha & John***

At the end of October, we flew on to France to visit extended family (M's maternal grandmother was French) and some US friends. The first stop was the medieval cathedral at Chartres – known for its amazing large blue stained-glass windows, exceptional preservation and sculptures. Then we took the train to visit M's cousin Jean-Pierre and partner Muriel in Angers (SW of Paris) who we've met several times during previous visits. They were wonderful hosts and we had really enjoyed our long talks (made possible by their excellent English!), delicious meals together, walks along the river, and visiting Angers



Castle which contains the impressive *Apocalypse Tapestry* (made from 1377-1383 for the Duke of Anjou). It is very significant because it is the largest set of medieval woven tapestries to have survived (100+ meters long), although it needed extensive restoration after being damaged during the French Revolution.



**Chartres Cathedral**



**Enjoying galettes on a cool afternoon**



**Traditional boats (toute) on a tributary of the Loire River**



**Medieval Apocalypse Tapestry**

From there, we caught a train to Châtellerault to see our (Ellensburg) friends Tom and Renée who had left the US for a 'house sitting' gig at a very quaint château in the Loire River valley (Château de la Barbelinière, photo below). The grounds are extensive and a game-keeper manages hunting in the château's forest. One day while out for a drive, we were surprised to hear a gun-shot and then see a wild boar sprint across the road in front of us and run toward the safety of the forest. Mostly though we spent time visiting the nearby towns of Richelieu and Loches, enjoying the local markets, interesting architecture and long, relaxing lunches. We reminisced, discussed future adventures and generally enjoyed the lovely cafés, as the French are wont to do. Aside from getting Covid-19 immediately after returning from France (likely caught on the plane), we have both been well and thankfully have no lasting effects.



**Old gate of Richelieu**



In late December, we drove 3 hours south from Perth to rendezvous with Melbourne friends Michelle and Thomas for a few days. We stayed in a cabin on a farm where they made very tasty sheep cheese! Then, we shared a wonderfully enjoyable Christmas lunch with friends Ursula, Chris and David in Perth, and on Boxing Day (26<sup>th</sup>) we took the ferry to Rottnest Island (just west of Perth and known for its marsupial quokkas) for a 2 day stay. We snorkelled, hiked a lot along the coast and inland parts of the island (great for burning off Christmas lunch!), and visited the lighthouses and historic buildings. Sadly, the island was used as an atrocious prison for Aboriginal male leaders and boys from the early 1800s to the mid 1900s.





***Rottne Island: one of the many beautiful coastal bays; a juvenile Quokka; and a Jewel Christmas spider***

Well, after 10 very enjoyable years in Perth, we are planning to leave in mid-March 2023. We will drive to Sydney/Newcastle, once we pack (a substantial job!). Although we are very grateful for our time in Perth, and we will really miss our wonderful friends and colleagues, it will be great to be closer to Stephen's Mum and family. We also look forward to exploring the eastern half of Australia – much of which we actually haven't visited in many years, or ever! Of course, we'll stay in touch and look forward to hearing from you, and perhaps even see you if you're in New South Wales!

We're sending our love and hope that you are healthy and content in 2023.  
Marie and Stephen

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