



Well we are home again at last, it does seem as though we have been traveling since last May and that's probably because we largely have been. Steph did warn me but there is a difference between knowing about something and actually doing it. It has been wonderful and I would not miss it for the world, but I am rather glad to be home, even though I am squirreled away with my laptop while three crews of tradies are installing solar panels. There is no power so I cannot rely on the cloud for my memory and I can type as long as my battery lasts.

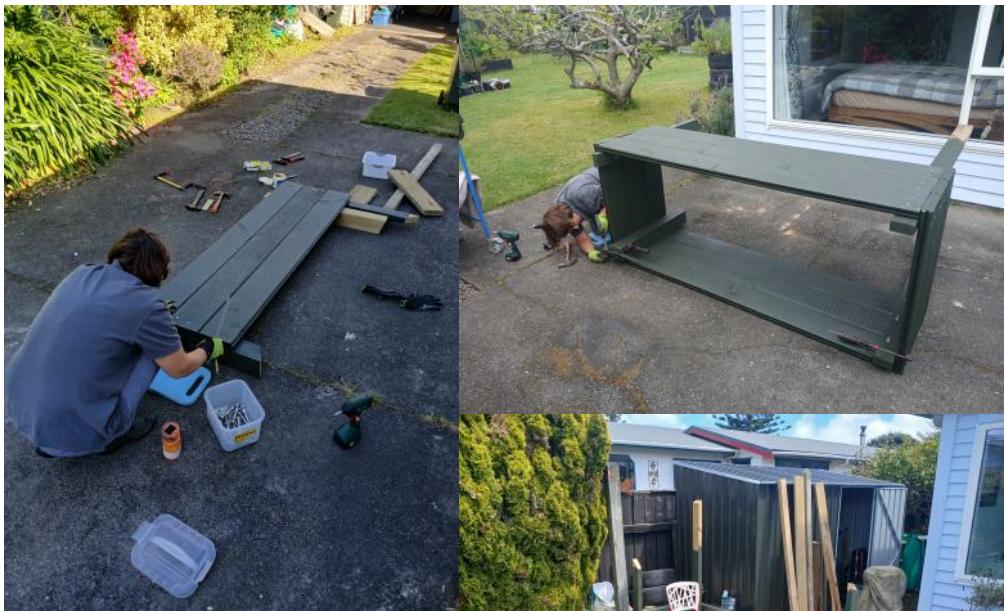
We did return from Europe at the end of September. We knew we would only have a month or so before we set off



to Australia in November. It felt good to be able to start to lay out projects in the house, we started to use some gifted wood to create a day bed. Its quite a

beast, the main structure looks as though it will last forever and I hope that I can lounge in the garden and read my book sometime this year. I

am tempted to say: where will I find the time?, but actually I gift myself time to read a lot, I guess I think its important to give myself time to smell the flowers and not just rush through everything. We also did some hiking proactice, for a hike in the new year and even bought a robot lawn mower.



And then we were off again. This trip was sort of an opportunist thing. England and Australia were contesting the Ashes in cricket in Australia, and that a pretty big thing and also Philippa and James are in Brisbane so we could go and visit with them and catch up. It sort of snowballed from there, we have never been to Perth and always wanted to, well we were almost there so why not, and when I looked at a map half way between Perth and Brisbane was Uluru, Ayres Rock in old money. So maybe we should try there as well. All the planning for the trip was done a long time ago in France in the northern summer. It turns out that we had to make some compromises. Cricket tickets were only available for certain days, day 4 in Brisbane, which meant that the game might not be on. Also Uluru might be half way between the two but you cannot fly there from Perth, we could go to Alice Springs which looked near but was a 5 hour drive away or catch a bus from Perth, which takes 4 days. So we are flying back to Melbourne and then back across the country to Uluru.

Well it's a long way to Perth. Two flights for us and we



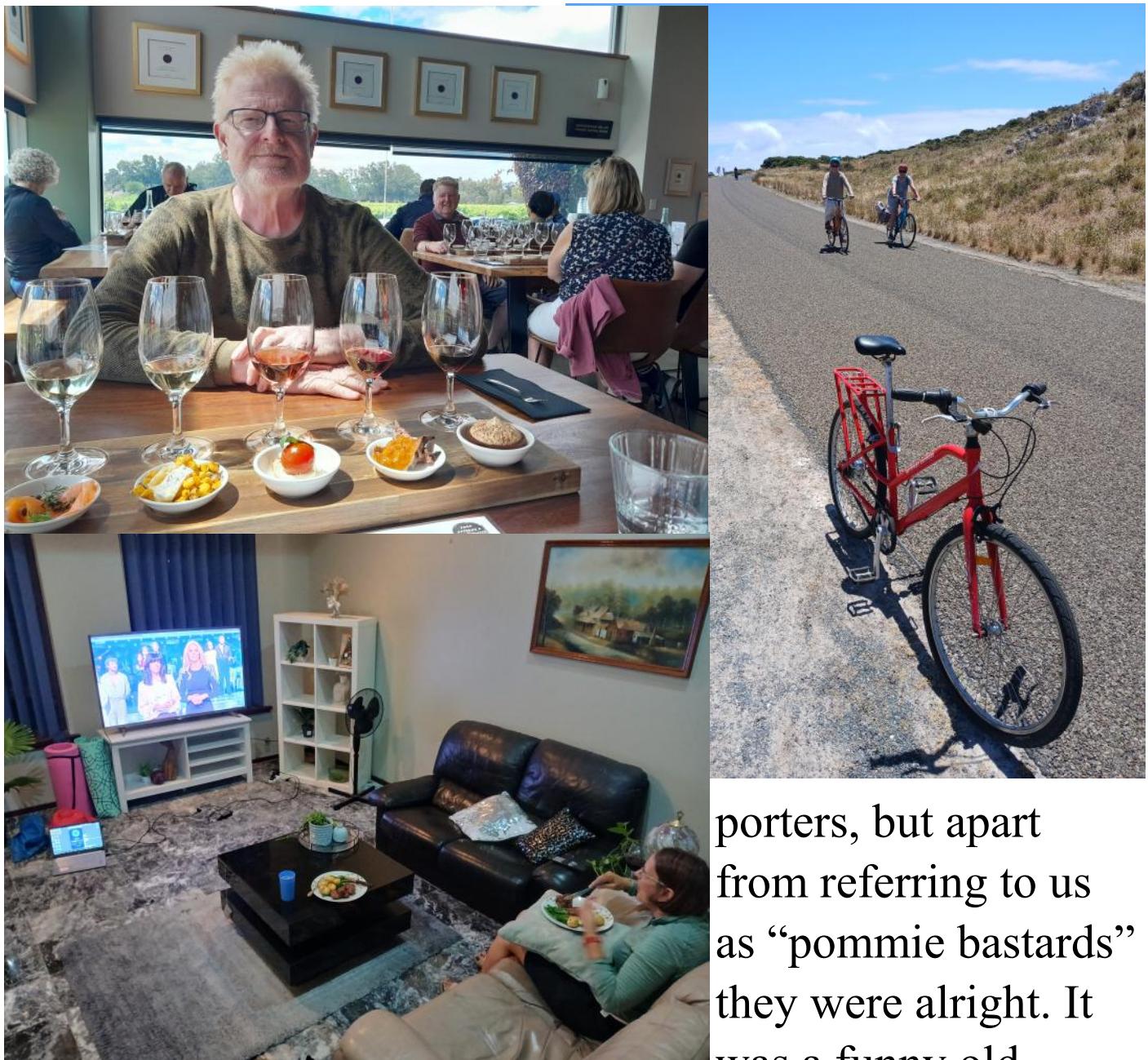
didn't get there until midnight. It was a bit tricky finding the house but when we did it was an adventure in its own right. We had a room in a three bedroom house.



On the first night an additional person turned up and slept in the lounge but after that things settled down. Like I said the Ashes is a big thing, in the cricket world and also in Australia. There are adverts on TV featuring cricketers and most overheard conversations are about the upcoming test matches. When we got to Brisbane airport they already had massive poster adverts celebrating the first victory to Australia a week after the test, “Convicts 1 Poms

0”, very subtle. Very odd. Also accommodation is hard to find so we discovered our housemates included Andy and Jeff, two aussie sup-





porters, but apart from referring to us as “pommie bastards” they were alright. It was a funny old

place, as everyone went to the cricket, and we were only going for one day we had the place to ourselves most of the time. We did get to see our first day at the test match, it was surprisingly chilly, they were having a cold snap, and also the match ended on day 2, which was exciting but did not bode well for out day 4 tickets for the next game. We could balance our cricket watching with exploring Freemantle, walking around the Swan River wineries, and cycling on Rottnest Island. There were an awful lot of

displaced cricket fans trying to find out what to do in Perth. We even got to watch Strictly



while eating a roast dinner with kangaroo in the evening.

It looked good on paper but the flight to Uluru was not ideal. We flew at midnight down to Melbourne and then arrived at 6am, slept in the airport for a while and then flew up to Uluru. We were a little frayed when we arrived. Some people were flying in on the afternoon, going to see the rock at dusk and then up for a dawn walk and then fly out 24 hours after they arrived. We are trying for a slower pace; in fact we have booked for a week, which is really not the norm. However, it did make some sense, we got a pretty large discount for staying longer and also we had come in the wrong season. We were here





in the hot season; most people come in the cold season. The reason is that the hot season is just too hot and the heat brings the clouds and the rain which isn't good. So many activities don't happen in December and January. However we were lucky, the weather wasn't great for the first two days, but we didn't mind as we had time to wait for the better weather, they were also having a cold snap which meant that the temperature was 30 degrees Celsius rather than 40 and also as we arrived right at the end of November so we could still do everything we wanted to do. The rock is amazing, I am so glad we don't have to walk up it, not only because of cultural reasons, though that would be enough, but also because it



looks so very dangerous. The guides tell us that some 40 odd people have died as a result of falling. Easily the best thing we did was to spend one morning walking around the base of the rock with a guide, just talking about how the aborigines live in the environment. This was a pat-



tern for three days, we would get up at 3:45 am, very dark and very pre-dawn, we would go and hike in the area as



the sun and temperature rose sometimes with a guide sometimes on our own. Then back to the resort town for a nap and a





swim in the pool. Then out again at dusk to watch the sun go down on the rock. It sounds like we had too much time but the colours and the light meant that there was always something different to see and I guess I may never go back there.

Then we are flying off to Melbourne, again, and up to Brisbane. Such a contrast from spending days walking in the desert and now we are with James and Philippa. They have a lovely little house a 15 minute bus ride into the city. Bella (the dog) who was very sick when we visited last year was all recovered and



great fun. It felt like a visit of two halves we were city kids with James and Philippa going to the Sky Deck



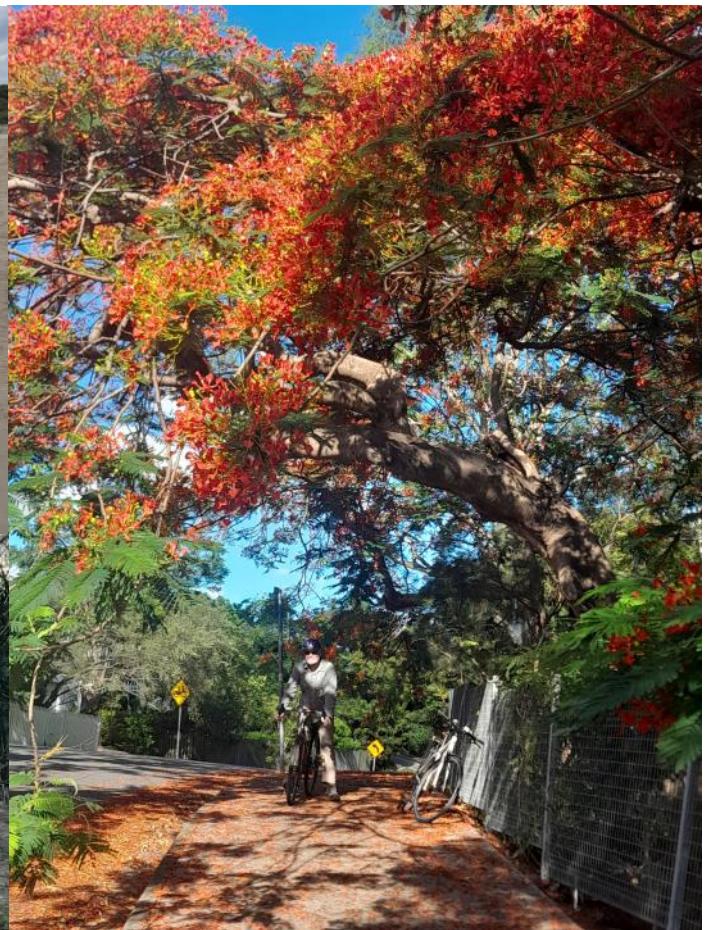
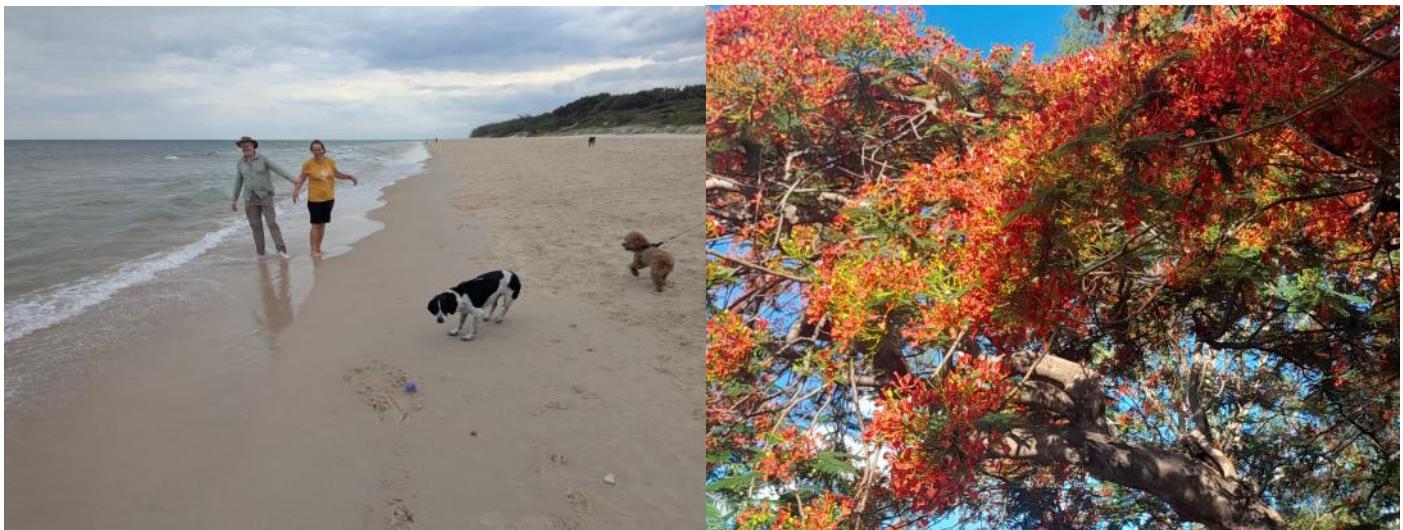
on top of the casino and the giant felons bar. The Sky Bar in blinding sunshine



meeting other visiting poms comparing notes on how we thought the test match

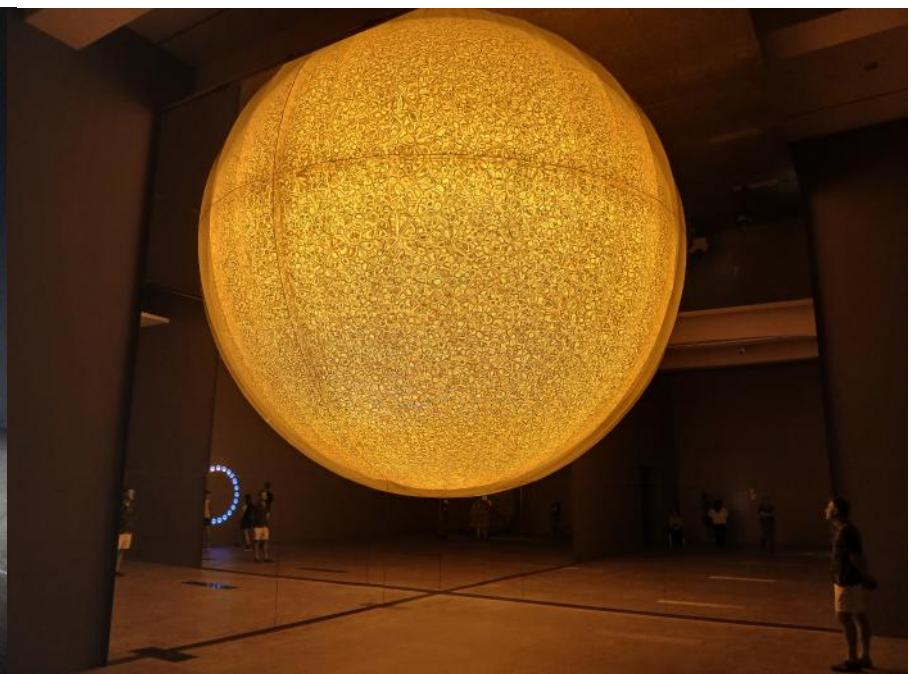
would go. Then after Philippa left for the UK we had a more chilled time with James, we cycled across the city and James drove





so we could meet up and walk Bella along the beach, we went and played mini

golf and we walked up hills and down to the pub and even got to go to the Banksy exhibition and the city art gallery.

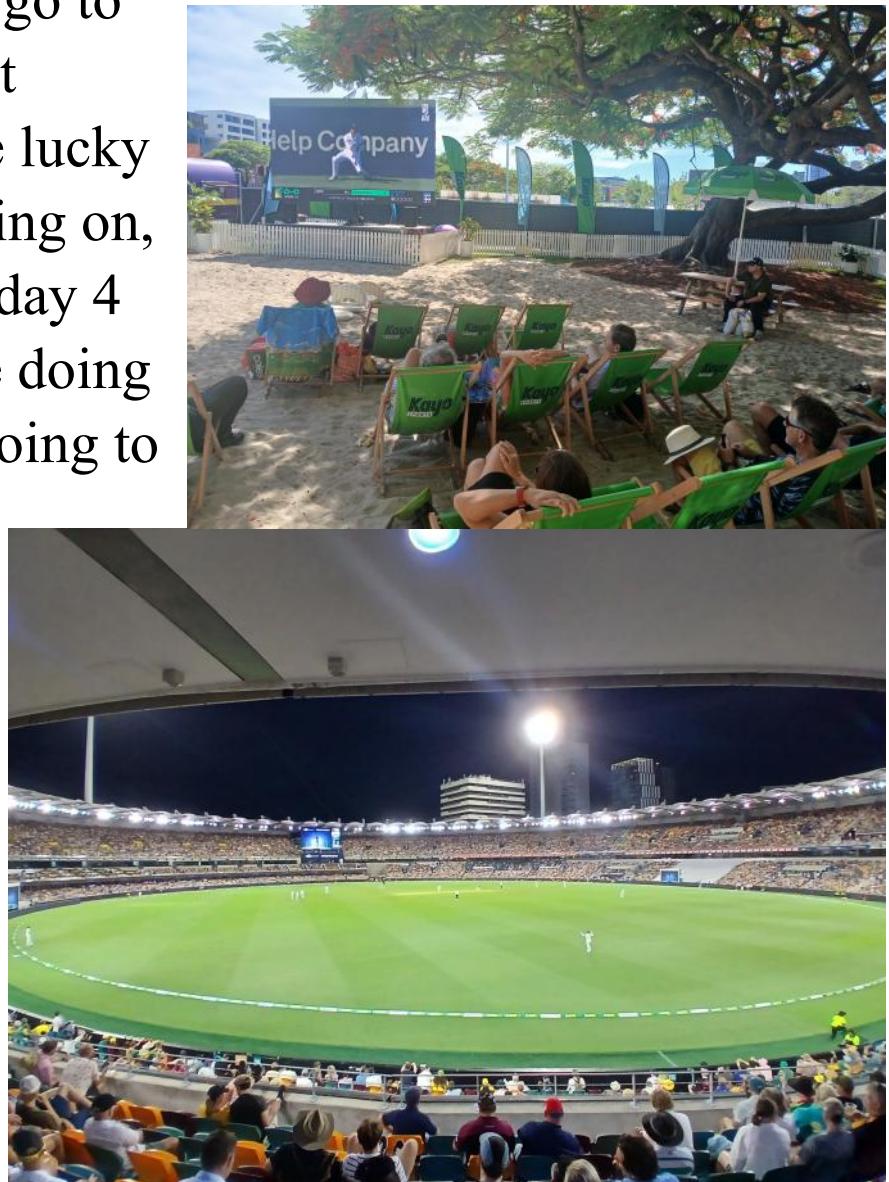




We saw some breathtaking and varied art, here and all over Australia.

In between we got to go to my first day-night test match. We were quite lucky the game was still going on, as we could only get day 4 tickets. England were doing better but were still going to lose but they managed to rally enough so that we got to see the game go into the night. What an event and I believe it's the last test to be played at the Gabba,

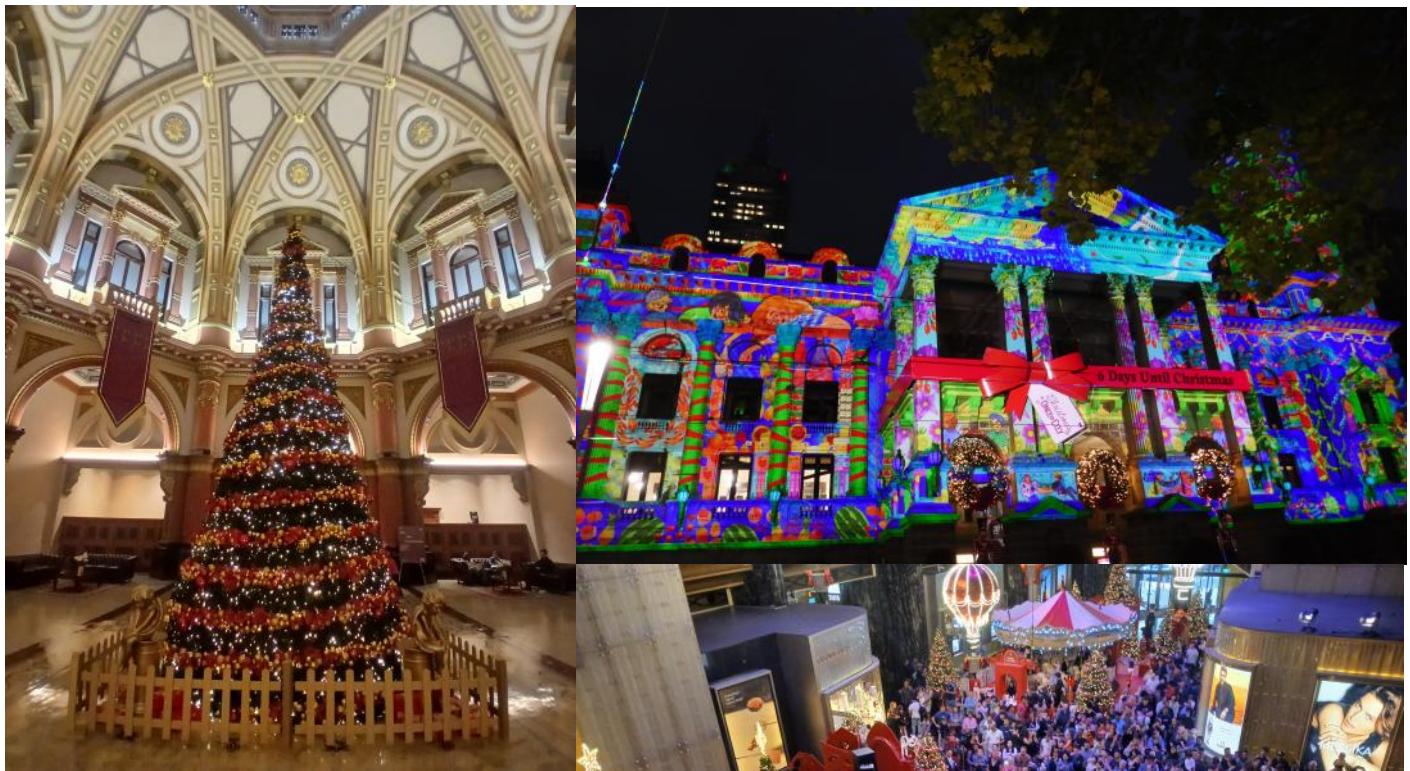
James went off to





the UK and we went off to Melbourne, again. Well it was the third time we had flown in but the first time we actually left the airport. Melbourne was lovely, and guess what, it was having a cold snap, Christmas Day was 15 degrees Celsius, the coldest in 20 years, mind you three days later it was in the thirties.





I like Melbourne city, it feels like a place we can wander around in and it's still very strange to see a sunny city all decked out in its Christmas lights. We even tracked down a Christmas Eve carol concert, not quite St Pauls but it was fun. We stayed in our sunny little house (house sitting two cats) and watch silly Christmas films and ate more kangaroo. We did get out into the suburbs and do some hiking, in sun and in some very wet





weather. We walked along the beach at St Kilda on Christmas Day and watched the Barmy Army playing beach cricket.

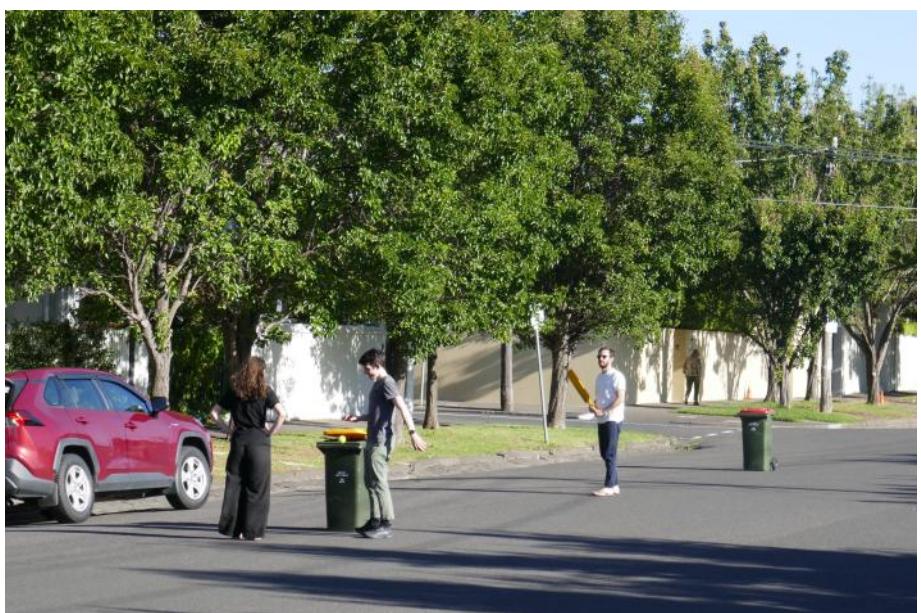


Our last day of cricket, it was a holiday in Australia, not a cricket tour, so we had only done three days in a month



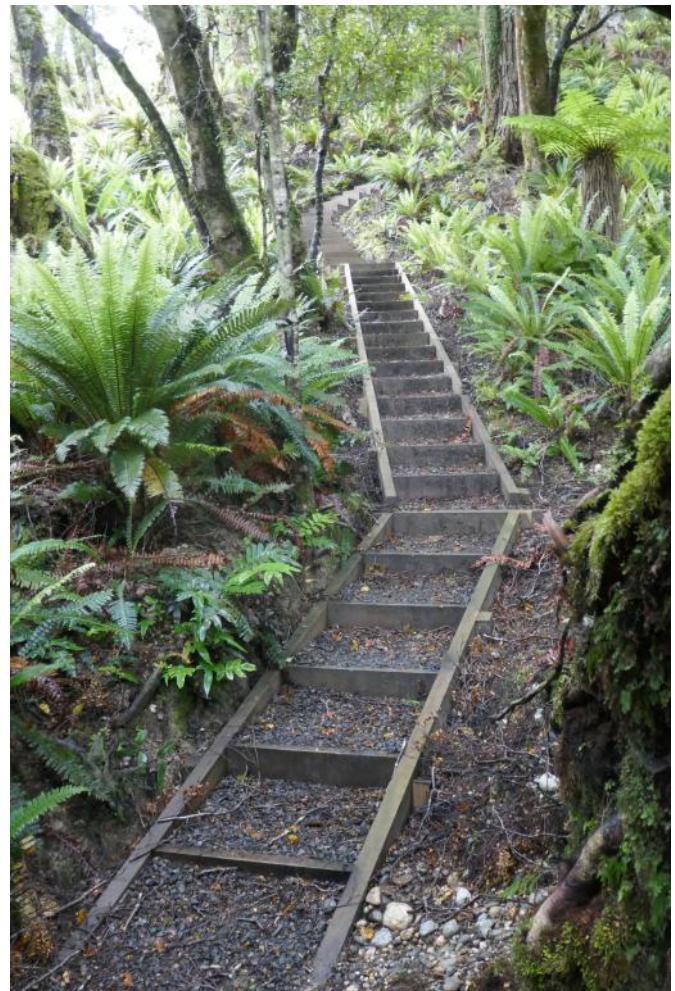
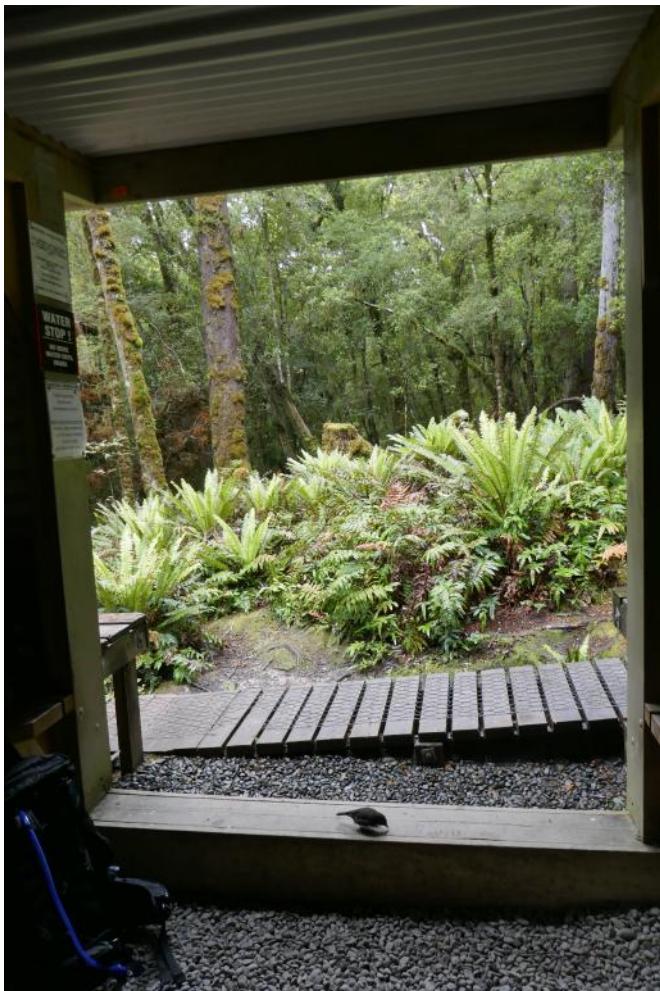
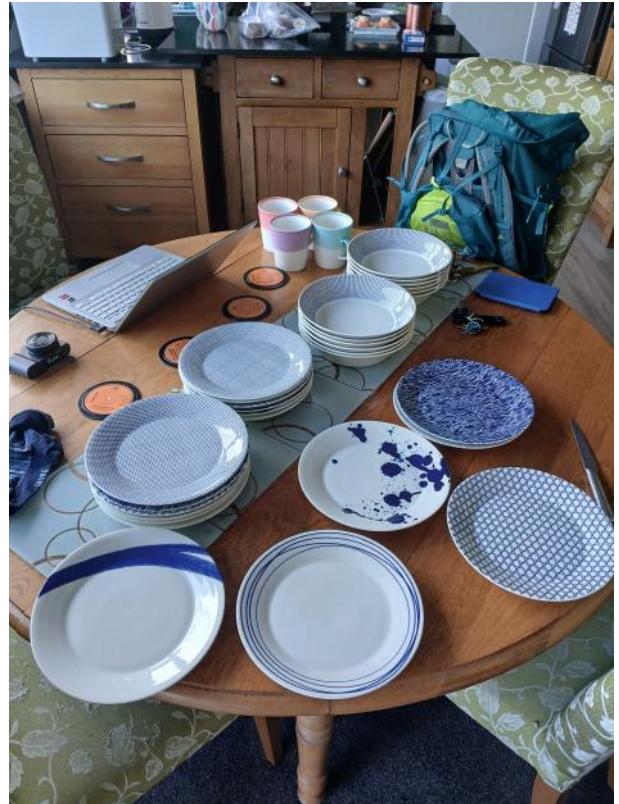
and a half. This last day was day 2 of the Boxing Day test and it was looking grim for England again and then all of a sudden the aussies slipped up and England managed to win, how fantastic, and once again the test ended on the day we attended.

We had managed to get some business class tickets home, it's only a four hour flight so it didn't really mean that much except we had 40 KG of luggage, each. So we could go shopping for crockery. We were lucky again, we managed to find



sets that we liked and got them on sale and packed 20 KG of crockery into our bags. It meant they were very heavy but we left lots of time and even managed to get them home without any breakages. We have only been looking for something we both liked for 6 years!!!

Back home for just a week, enough time to do the washing and repack, then we are off to the South Island, hiking with friends. It was all organized ages ago and like I said it looked good on paper. We took our time getting down to



the bottom of the South Island and met up with Catherine and Sarah to hike the Hump Ridge track. We had done it 10 years ago and found it quite a challenge, this time we were 10 years older so I was a little worried but actually they had upgraded to path to offset me being older so all was good. The weather wasn't ideal but at least it didn't rain but we didn't get majestic views over the sea, only views into the clouds. We all managed to do hike, a big climb and 20+ KM three days in a



row, so when we got back to Invercargill and went out for a meal we did look like we needed walking frames, thank god it was only two blocks to the restaurant and we could hobble back to the apartment for cards.

On the way back up the island we stopped off in a small town called Lawrence and just chilled in the sun, read our books and did some more gentle hiking in the hills. We are so blessed to be able to take



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time like this and I try to remind myself of how lucky I am every day. On our way through Christchurch Steph spotted we could get some cheap tickets for Ed Sheeran and suggested

we should go. I often think that these big stadium shows are a lot of effort, discomfort and cost for not enough return, and tonight the weather was pretty bad, even Ed said he



thought we were brave coming out in driving rain to see the show. It had been worse last night as they had lost multiple instruments, waterlogged by the rain. The performers were getting just as wet as we were; in fact one said that tonight it would be great as tonight they were wearing coats. He was right, it actually was an amazing show and 6 hours flew by, mind you I was glad of a hot shower afterwards.

Now we are back home and actually staying here for a while. We have visitors but we should be able to make some progress on our projects and even walk down the beach for dinner. In fact its very sunny and my laptop battery is running low so maybe we will walk down now.

