

MORE  
COMINGS  
AND  
GOINGS

A Sequel to  
Round the World in Eighty Places

Compiled by J. L. Herrera

## Dedicated to:

The women and children who followed someone else's dream,  
including my great grandmother, Caroline Husband-Smith née Martin  
and my grandmother, Hilda Clarke née Colgan.

## And with Thanks to:

Louise Byrne, Ken Clarke, Anita Clarkson, Carol Bacon, Jacquie Brodrick,  
Atsuko Byarkuno, Brenda Dudkowiak, Ellen Naef, Isla MacGregor, Julio Herrera.

## Introduction

When I put together *Round the World in Eighty Places* I thought it would put to bed any vague feelings of wanderlust I might have but every so often I come across the mention of somewhere which intrigues me enough to want to put down a quote or two. So here is a very short sequel.

And just to make it more unexpected if not more interesting I have closed my eyes and stuck a pin into a map for one of my destinations—though making sure my map was placed on the table in such a way that my pin was unlikely to wander into an area devoid of land or which distinctly discourages visitors.

J. L. Herrera, Hobart 2022

## PREFACE

Where we choose to travel, even if we don't recognize it, often has something to do with the weather. If palm trees were not accompanied by sunshine we would not find them half as alluring.

"Sheep seem to be uneasy-like this mornin', and there's one old tup [ram] up there" — here he pointed with his stick towards the summit — "allus tells ye what to expect from the weather." He paused and scanned the distant heights. "Aye, there he is, look ye — it'll rain right enough."

I looked in the direction he pointed, and saw what to me was a horned sheep feeding with others of its kind. But I could see no connection between the old tup and the weather. I turned to my companion, and found him smiling at me — probably pitying the poor townsman who needed a barometer as a weather-prophet.

"See owt?"

"Nowt," I answered, whereat the old boy laughed. The "nowt" put him in good humour, and he began to throw off his reserve.

"That old tup," he said, "allus feeds with his tail to the wind when rain be comin' on. When he's head on to it, ye can expect fairish weather. He never fails."

I looked up with renewed interest towards the heights. The tup was certainly feeding with his tail towards the wind.

"I suppose you never hear the wireless or listen to the weather forecasts, do you?" I asked.

"Verra seldom," he said. "I have heard it, but I didna like it. Did you see many rabbits oot feedin' as ye cam' along?"

I nodded, and said, "Scores of them."

"There ye are," he said, rubbing his rough hands together. "They're night-feeders, but if rain's comin' in the night, they know it — and they tak' their chance while it's dry-like. Aye," he added, "there'll be rain tonight."

We walked along together in silence, and, coming to a place which overlooked a wide stretch of country, the shepherd said, pointing to a grass field:

"There's another sign fer ye."

I looked at the field to which his stick directed me. A number of rooks were busy on its surface.

"D'ye see yon wood behind 'em?" he asked. "That's their roosting-place. Not verra far away from it, are they? In fine weather they go miles away to find food. But not if they're likely to be caught in a storm. Aye, it'll rain all night, and heavy too," he added.

I put these weather-signs in my mental pocket-book. As I wrote them down with the pen of thought, I caught sight of others which I had picked up in my wanderings:

"When the scarlet pimpernel is closed, take your mackintosh."

"When the swallows hawk high in the air, then never fear the weather."

"When bees stay in the hive, don't go far away from a refuge."

"Rain before seven, fine before eleven."

"Mackerel sky — twelve hours dry."

G. Bramwell Evens. *A Romany in the Fields*.

Two I remember from childhood were:

"Red sky at night, shepherd's delight,

Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning."      And:

"Mackerel skies and mares' tails,

Make tall ships carry short sails."

And then there were the butterflies. I loved butterflies for their beauty and brief fascination. And they were a perfect indicator of rain coming. The trouble is: where do you find butterflies in big cities? Are there butterflies round the Sphinx or on the beaches of the Riviera or settling on the Sydney Harbour Bridge?

## MORE COMINGS AND GOINGS

### A Ais for Ambon.

“When Alfred Russel Wallace sailed into Ambon Harbour in what is now eastern Indonesia in 1857, he saw:

one of the most astonishing and beautiful sights I have ever beheld. The bottom was absolutely hidden by a continuous series of corals, sponges, actiniae, and other marine productions, of magnificent dimensions, varied forms, and brilliant colours. The depth varied from about twenty to fifty feet, and the bottom was very uneven, rocks and chasms, and little hills and valleys, offering a variety of stations for the growth of these animal forests. In and out among them moved numbers of blue and red and yellow fishes, spotted and banded and striped in the most striking manner, while great orange or rosy transparent medusae floated along near the surface. It was a sight to gaze at for hours, and no description can do justice to its surpassing beauty and interest.

“During the 1990s I often sailed down Ambon Harbour, yet saw no coral gardens, no medusae, no fishes, nor even the bottom. Instead, the opaque water stank and was thick with effluent and garbage. As I neared the town it just got worse, until I was greeted with rafts of faeces, plastic bags, and the intestines of butchered goats.”

Tim Flannery in *The Weather Makers*.

He goes on to say, “Ambon Harbour is just one among countless examples of coral reefs that have been devastated over the course of the twentieth century.”

You could, of course, avoid the harbour and look elsewhere on the island for beauty.

“The following night I caught the Pelni passenger ship to Papua, and after a day and a night it reached Ambon City, which looked like something from the Balkan wars. A whole burnt-out city surrounding a beautiful bay. It was full of small, six or seven-storey office blocks, shops, department stores and apartment blocks, all gutted and empty. It was another testament to the violence inspired by the Indonesian military and the intractable problems of holding the false state together. The conflict there between the Muslims and Christians had apparently started over an argument between two men on a bus in January 1999. No-one has ever really established why it spiraled out of control and resulted in the deaths of between 5000 and 10,000 people over the next three years. There were many instances of the military siding with and arming the Muslims but also reports of the police aiding the Christians. As the religious slaughter ran its course, turning the Maluku island group into a war zone of burnt-down communities, frequent bombings and bands of villagers forced to defend themselves with homemade weapons, elements among the Indonesian military supported the movement of 2000 Laskar Jihad Islamic volunteers to be sent to the islands, initiating another round of ethnic slaughter.

The accepted version of events in the Maluku is that the military provoked and prolonged the conflict to further their own interests there and the state of emergency that was announced in 2000 was only rescinded in late 2003. Officially, there are still 300,000 refugees from the conflict but the real figure is much higher, many people having left for other parts of Indonesia.”

John Martinkus in *Indonesia's Secret War in Aceh*.

So perhaps you might like to see if things have improved before you book your ticket ...

## ARCTIC

The Arctic is of course too big a subject to cover in a couple of paragraphs. But I was recently watching Billy Connolly wandering around northern Canada and I was astonished by the beauty of places such as Baffin Island.

“When we pause again at the foot of the mountain the sun has gone down, leaving a scene of extraordinary beauty and peace. From where we stand behind the settlement we can see the sharp silhouette of the skin tents and then further away, the dark blue ice mountains and the clear contours of mainland and islands, standing out against a sky most wonderfully coloured, a sight to make the heart stop beating. The colours range from gold through all the shades of the spectrum, blending nearest the horizon in a simple tone of reddish gold topped by a veil of deep purple, shot with long streaks of red.”

Aage Gilberg in *Eskimo Doctor*. He also speaks of a “bare but lovely land”. The only downside to this beauty is the weather. And perhaps the difficulty of getting there. And perhaps the remaining polar bears if you were thinking of camping.

While I was thinking about the Arctic (and I noticed there were far more books, perhaps understandably, about the Antarctic here) I came upon a children’s story called *Helen Thayer’s Arctic Adventure* by Sally Isaacs. Helen Thayer was born in New Zealand where she was inspired to begin her own life of walking, climbing, and kayaking by hearing Sir Edmund Hillary speak at her school. “Helen and Charlie (her dog) met in the northern Canadian village of Resolute. A small plane flew them 57 miles (92 kilometers) up to Little Cornwallis Island where they began their walk. They walked through the Arctic from March 30 to April 27, 1988, in a triangular route around the magnetic North Pole. She wrote a book about this historical journey. It is called *Polar Dream*. The expedition made Helen the first woman to walk alone to any of the Earth’s poles.”

“About sixteen years ago, at the age of sixty-one, I became the oldest man on earth to reach the North Magnetic Pole on foot. Is there no end to my talents? Quite a bloody achievement, I can tell you – almost killed me. Anyway, as you get nearer to the Pole and the magnetic field starts to strengthen, all your hair stands on end and everything starts to vibrate. It’s natural, when you think about it, but the experience itself is really quite bizarre.”

Brian Blessed in *Absolute Pandemonium*.

I didn’t actually know where the magnetic North Pole was and as it shifts around it might take some finding. Russia and Canada make up the bulk of the land abutting the Arctic Sea but it seems the magnetic Pole stays in northern Canada. And the Arctic Sea is gradually losing its ice and becoming open water but the “bare but lovely” lands remain.

“While Colin’s two boatyards at Tolderodden and Rekkevik were still busy, the most significant decade, the 1890s, provided the climax of his career as naval architect and boat builder. Great honours had already been bestowed upon him by the King of Norway: the Cross of the Order of St Olav ‘for services rendered for ship construction and the furtherance of scientific voyages of discovery’. Colin’s contribution to science came with his designing and building the polar ship *Fram* (launched at Rekkevik in 1892) which was to take Fridtjof Nansen closer to the North Pole than any previous vessel and, eventually, enable Roald Amundsen to plant the Norwegian flag at the South Pole in 1911, just weeks ahead of British explorer, Robert Falcon Scott.

“These were events which brought world-wide acclaim to *Fram*’s architect, but for the people of Norway Colin Archer was to be almost canonised for his innovative design for rescue boats (life boats) which saved many hundreds of lives. The prototype which he built in 1893, using some materials left over from *Fram*’s construction, was named *RSI Colin Archer* in his honour by the *Norsk Selskab til Skibbrudnes Redning* (Society for the Rescue of the Shipwrecked). That it was still sailing in Norwegian waters in the final years of the twentieth century, and training young people in the art of sailing, says a great deal about Colin Archer’s architectural skills and his integrity as a builder. At least half a dozen books, in English as well as Norwegian, have been published on his life and work in the seventy-five years since his death. In his lifetime, neither national nor international praise diverted him from those things which meant most to him: his family, his religion, his love of sailing and his duty as a citizen of Larvik and Norway.”

Lorna McDonald in *Over Earth And Ocean*. Most of Colin’s brothers came to find varying fortunes in Australia; hence her interest in the family.

“The top of the world is disclosing secrets that have lain hidden for hundreds of thousands of years. As the ice disappears, new rivers are flowing; islands are breaking the waves; shipping routes are opening and geopolitical disputes heating up.”

Alastair Bonnett in *Beyond the Map*. Among the amazing things discovered are a giant canyon beneath the ice in Greenland, aquifers gushing meltwater from huge caves, new islands, “the southern part of the main island of Spitsbergen is dividing off into a separate island”, and the Northwest Passage ... “It took Roald Amundsen three years, from 1903 to 1906, to become the first person to navigate it successfully. At times the water Amudsen sailed was only three feet deep, so back then the route was of little practical value. In 2016 the cruise ship *Crystal Serenity* took a thousand tourists on a leisurely reconnoitre of Amundsen’s route. However, the channels above Canada are complex; many are still shallow, and while the US and Europe claim that the Northwest Passage is an international strait, Canada says it is not. Hence other options are being actively planned. A fantastic new possibility is seizing the imagination, the Transpolar Sea Route: a shipping lane that will allow vessels to sail straight over the top of the world, connecting the Pacific with the Atlantic.” As well as changing travel the retreat of the ice will make it easier to mine oil, gas, and minerals.

He ends by saying, “The Arctic is giving up its secrets; new landscapes and new opportunities are breaking the waves. If the squabbling continues, and efforts to establish the Arctic as a common inheritance and as an international conservation area cannot bear fruit, it will soon be witness to a twenty-first century gold rush. The release of huge reserves of oil and gas will further exacerbate global warming and the retreat of the ice. In future years, we may be known as the generation that gave away the Arctic, even though it was not ours to give.”

## Amight also be for ARGENTINA

Argentina was not part of the Inca empire (of course modern Argentina has European borders not indigenous ones) but it is sometimes forgotten, in all the pictures of wide brown pampas or bustling Buenos Aires, of tangos and huge steaks, that it is an Andean country. Wade Davis wrote ‘The Day the Way Lakas Dance’ in David Suzuki’s ‘When the Wild Comes Leaping Up’:

“As I sat in the Temple of the Moon, surrounded by some of the finest Inca masonry in existence, I recorded these notes in my journal and later incorporated them into the book *One River*:

For the people of the Andes, matter is fluid. Bones are not death but life crystallized, and thus potent sources of energy, like a stone charged by lightning or a plant brought into being by the sun. Water is vapor, a miasma of disease and mystery, but in its purest state it is ice, the shape of snowfields on the flanks of mountains, the glaciers that are the highest and most sacred destination of the pilgrims. When an Inca mason placed his hands on rock, he did not

feel cold granite; he sensed life, the power and resonance of the Earth within the stone. Transporting it into a perfect ashlar or a block of polygonal masonry was service to the Inca, and thus a gesture to the gods, and for such a task, time had no meaning. This attitude, once harnessed by an imperial system capable of recruiting workers by the thousand, made almost anything possible.

If stones are dynamic, it is only because they are part of the land of Pachamama. For the people of the Andes, the Earth is alive, and every wrinkle on the landscape, every hill and outcrop, every mountain and stream has a name and is imbued with ritual significance. The high peaks are addressed as *Apu*, meaning “Lord.” Together the mountains are known as the *Tayakuna*, the fathers, and some are so powerful that it can be dangerous even to look at them. Other sacred places, a cave or mountain pass, a waterfall where the rushing water speaks as an oracle, are honored as the *Tirakuna*. These are not spirits dwelling within landmarks. Rather, the reverence is for the actual place itself.

A mountain is an ancestor, a protective being, and all those living within the shadow of a high peak share in its benevolence or wrath. The rivers are the open veins of the Earth, the Milky Way their heavenly counterpart. Rainbows are double-headed serpents which emerge from hallowed springs, arch across the sky, and bury themselves again in the earth. Shooting stars are bolts of silver. Behind them lie all the heavens, including the dark patches of cosmic dust, the negative constellations which to the highland Indians are as meaningful as the clusters of stars that form animals in the sky.”

“These notions of the sanctity of land were ancient in the Andes. The Spanish did everything in their power to crush the spirit of the people, destroying the temples, tearing asunder the sanctuaries, violating the offerings to the sun. But it was not a shrine that the Indians worshipped, it was the land itself: the rivers and waterfalls, the rocky outcrops and mountain peaks, the rainbows and stars. Every time a Catholic priest planted a cross on top of an ancient site, he merely confirmed in the eyes of the people the inherent sacredness of the place. In the wake of the Spanish Conquest, when the last of the temples lay in ruins, Earth endured, the one religious icon that even the Spaniards could not destroy. Through the centuries, the character of the relationship between the people and their land has changed, but not its fundamental importance.

“This pact, never spoken about and never forgotten, was in its own way, a perfect reflection of the Andes, where the foundation of all life, both today and in the time of the Anca, has always been reciprocity. One sees it in the fields, where men come together and work in teams, moving between rows of fava beans and potatoes, season to season, a day for a day, planting, hoeing, weeding, mounding, harvesting. There is a spiritual exchange in the morning when the first of a family to awake salutes the sun, and at the end of the day when a father returning from the fields whispers prayers of thanksgiving and lights a candle before greeting his family. Every offering is a gift: blossoms scattered on to fertile fields, the blessing of the children and tools at the end of each day, coca leaves presented to Pachamama at any given moment when people meet on a trail, they pause and exchange *k'intus* of coca, three perfect leaves aligned to form a cross. Turning to face the nearest *apu*, or mountain spirit, they bring the leaves to the mouth and blow softly, a ritual invocation that sends the essence of the plant back to the earth, the community, the sacred places, and the souls of the ancestors. The exchange of leaves is a social gesture, a way of acknowledging a human connection. But the blowing of the *phukuy*, as it is called, is an act of spiritual reciprocity, for in giving selflessly to the earth, the individual ensures that in time the energy of the coca will return full circle, as surely as rain falling on a field will inevitably be reborn as a cloud.”

And everyone who came within sight of those soaring mountains felt an awe, even a sense of sacredness.

A. F. Tschiffely was not born in Argentina but he made it his own by reason of his long travels throughout the country, first by pony and later by car. *Tschiffely's Ride* is a fascinating book though he does tell an interesting story in his later book ... in which he mentions the incredibly acute hearing of the indigenous people. Argentina's native tribes such as the Tehuelche (the people of the Tehuel) have suffered greatly under Spanish and Argentine rule.

"After completing my education, I had spent some time teaching in England and had then come out to the Argentine, where I spent nine years in the largest English-American school in the country. For a long time I had felt that a schoolmaster's life, pleasant though it is in many ways, does not afford much prospect and is apt to lead one into a groove. I wanted variety: I was young and fit; the idea of this journey had been in my head for years, and finally I determined to make the attempt.

As a result of various enquiries I went to the office of *La Nación*, the leading newspaper of the Argentine, and put forward my idea. When once they were convinced that I was not one of the many who come to them for funds to assist in some imaginary exploit, but that I wanted information and nothing more, they received me with the greatest courtesy and gave me every possible assistance, and at length I was put in touch with Dr. Emilio Solanet, a most enthusiastic breeder of the Creole horse and one of the greatest authorities on the subject, and to whom I shall always be under debt of gratitude. He eagerly took up the idea and undertook to supply the two horses for the trip.

A few words on the origin of the Creole horse may help the reader to understand the reasons for their powers of resistance. They are the descendants of a few horses brought to the Argentine in 1535 by Don Pedro Mendoza, the founder of the city of Buenos Aires. These animals were of the finest Spanish stock, at that time the best in Europe, with a large admixture of Arab and Barb blood in their veins. That these were the first horses in America is borne out by history, by tradition, and by the fact that no native American dialect contains a word for horse." The horses eventually ran wild, getting smaller and hardier over time. "The two horses given to me by Dr. Solanet were "Mancha", who was at the time sixteen years old, and "Gato", who was fifteen. They had formerly been the property of a Patagonian Indian Chief named Liempichun ("I have feathers") and were the wildest of the wild."

("The Criollo has figured largely and successfully in many endurance tests, both official and otherwise. It may be noted here that the two famous horses "Mancha" and "Gato" were Criollos, and that they, at the ages of 15 and 16, took part in that epic of endurance when they carried Professor A. F. Tschiffely from Buenos Aires to New York, overcoming incredible difficulties and covering 13,350 miles at an average of 26.5 miles on each day's journey, and achieving a record in altitude of 19,250 feet. An outstanding incident of this amazing journey was that they travelled 93 miles across a desert in Ecuador without water in a temperature of 120 degrees."

*The Observer's Book of Horses and Ponies.* R. S. Summerhays.)

He got blood-poisoning in northern Argentina and was afraid he would have to turn back. "In a lonely hut of a mountaineer I was told about an Indian herb doctor who had great fame in the neighbourhood, and when I agreed to it somebody went to call him. He was an elderly and obviously poor Indian, and not of the type who might inspire the average patient with confidence, but when he asked me a series of highly intelligent questions, which were interpreted to me by a person who could speak both Quichua and Spanish, I began to realise that he knew far more than I had given him credit for. He declared that the case was not a serious one and immediately set to work boiling some dry herbs which he carried in a poncho on his back. When they were ready for use, the steaming herbs, which looked very much like spinach, were laid on the open sores. He

stayed with me for two days, and prior to leaving he recommended that I should drink no alcohol, eat no meat nor eggs, and drink tea made from herbs he gave me. His fees for his “professional services”, including the long journeys, amounted to one boliviano, or roughly 1s. 6d., and when I gave him five times that amount his appreciation could be read on his rugged face. Within five days I was able to proceed, but, of course, the wounds were not closed and I could not wear a boot on my right leg”.

“In the north of the Argentine I spent two days with a settler on his small farm. He possessed several burros, and as we discussed the relative sense of the different domestic animals, my host, who was an ardent supporter of the donkeys, told me that no puma could kill a burro born in that region. In that particular neighbourhood there were many pumas, and in order to entertain me, and at the same time to prove his statement, the man led a donkey away to a hollow, where he tied him to a solitary bush with a rope. This done we went away some 150 yards and lay down to wait to see what would happen. It was just growing dark, and after a wait of some two hours I began to think there were no pumas in the district.

It was a bright night, and with the help of my field-glasses I could see the burro quite well. Presently he doubled his legs and rolled over on his side, and then my host touched my arm and pointed towards the animal, and, sure enough, there I could see the puma, like a shadow, slowly creeping towards the poor burro, who then rolled right over on his back and started to kick wildly with all fours, at the same time making noises that were terrible to hear. The puma made a large circle around him and then slowly slunk away and disappeared. The man then told me that the burros there seem to know that a puma will only attack by jumping on the neck of his prey, and I had to admit that I had never suspected burros to have as much sense and cold blood under such trying circumstances as his shaggy little animal had just proved himself to possess. Good for donkey sense!”

In a 1948 story he called ‘Ming and Ping’ he has an ‘Indian’ say, “White man greedy, very greedy, look for gold and take land from Indian, then make him work for nothing or drive him into forest. If Indian no like, white man sends soldiers with rifles, and if Indian fights to keep his land, soldiers kill Indian, and say he dangerous savage.”

Tom Michell in *The Penguin Lessons* gave a different little insight into life in Argentina. He was English and came to teach at the St George’s College for Boys in Buenos Aires in the 1960s. While staying in a friend’s apartment at Punta del Este in Uruguay he found a penguin covered in oil on the beach. He cleaned him up but couldn’t persuade him to leave and go back to sea so he sneaked him back through Immigration and Customs into Argentina. The penguin, christened Juan Salvado, became an ‘institution’ at the school, loved by boys, teachers, and domestic staff. But Michell felt that his penguin would need to return eventually to his own kind.

He visits the zoo in Buenos Aires but its penguins in their hot concrete enclosure look miserable. So he sets out southwards on his motorbike to find a penguin colony. “Argentina is blessed with a long and spectacular coastline, parts of which are notable breeding grounds for maritime birds and animals. Peninsula Valdés, which lies some 900 miles by road from St George’s, is one such, renowned not only for colonies of penguins but also for sea lions, elephant seals and whales.”

But he needs to find a colony of Magellan penguins. “The minor road that led to Punta Tombo was a simple pot-holed dirt track, so the hundred or so miles from the Valdés Peninsula to the point took a full day but when I eventually arrived, the sight was so breathtaking, so spectacular, so abounding with Magellan penguins that I knew it would have been worth it even if I’d had to push the bike the entire way.”

The trouble then was—how do you carry a penguin on a motorbike? And I suspect he was also reluctant to part with Juan Salvado. And while the penguin is still at the college he dies. This was a sad ending though of course no one knew the age of the penguin when he was rescued. Many years later Tom Michell returns to Argentina and visits a penguin sanctuary knowledgeably run by David Méndez who provides him with the clue to Juan Salvado's affectionate life in the college. "You can't release penguins on their own," the keeper explained. "Like sea lions, come to that, they simply won't go without a fellow creature of their own kind, they won't leave."

St George's College still exists. And I hope Argentina is cherishing its penguins ...

George Pendle in *The Land and People of Argentina* wrote, "An Argentine statesman, D. F. Sarmiento (Domingo Sarmiento, president from 1868 to 1874), asked: "I wonder what impression must be left in the Argentine by the simple act of fixing his eyes on the horizon and seeing...*and not seeing anything?*" And Sarmiento wrote: "Argentina's tragedy is its vastness. The solitude, the desolation without a single human dwelling, divide province from province." The gauchos' songs are appropriately known as *tristes*, or laments. ... The gaucho was always a romantic figure, and many poems and books have been written about him. The most famous of the poems is *Martin Fierro*, and the most popular gaucho novel is *Don Segundo Sombra*, both of which you can read in English translations. Walter Owen, in his rhyming version of *Martin Fierro*, conveyed the gaucho spirit in such lines as:

A son am I of the rolling plain,  
A gaucho born and bred;  
For me the whole great world is small,  
Believe me, my heart can hold it all;  
The snake strikes not at my passing foot,  
The sun burns not my head.

I was born on the mighty Pampas' breast,  
As the fish is born in the sea;  
Here was I born and here I live,  
And what seemed good to God to give,  
When I came to the world; it will please Him too,  
That I take away with me.

And this is my pride: to live as free  
As the bird that cleaves the sky;  
I build no nest on this careworn earth,  
Where sorrow is long, and short is mirth,  
And when I am gone none will grieve for me,  
And none care where I lie.

I have kept my feet from trap or trick  
In the risky trails of love;  
I have roamed as free as the winging bird,  
And many a heart my song has stirred,  
But my couch is the clover of the plain,  
With the shining stars above."

For some reason I didn't note down where I found this, possibly because I was more interested in wondering what the calafete berry tasted like. I think it came from Rae Natalie Goodall

but I might be wrong. So bearing in mind this omission here is something for you to wonder about too.

“The calafete berry, or barberry, grows in great profusion in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego and tastes similar to the blackcurrent or blueberry. In Patagonia there is an old saying ‘Quien come el calafete vuelve por más’ (Whoever eats the calafete berry will come back for more) which just shows how addictive this berry – or the landscape – can be. The calafete grows on spiny bushes and ripens between January and March. Its dark purple juice stains the lips and tongue a beautiful mauve. It also happens to be a good laxative. As the berries are full of pips it is best to gather a quantity and stew them in a little water and sugar. Then you can strain off the juice (we used some spare mosquito netting) and you will have a thick syrup which will keep a few days and can be diluted as you need it. It is especially good poured over the morning’s porridge, or as dessert with yoghurt or custard.

“The wild strawberry or rainberry grows abundantly in Tierra del Fuego. Being composed of lots of tiny lumps, it looks like a small raspberry and tends to grow in tree mould or moss. Delicious with sugar and cream.

“The diddle-dee berry (sepisa) found in many parts of Tierra del Fuego, is rather bland compared with the rainberry. There are two types: bright red or black.

“The blackcurrent grows extensively in Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia. But it is unwise to eat a huge quantity as it is an effective laxative.

“Blackberry (mora) bushes were introduced to Chile by the early settlers as hedging, and they soon spread throughout the Lake District. You can stuff your face with blackberries in this area in March and April.

“The murta berry has a sweet slightly perfumed flavour and makes delicious jam. If you visit the Lake District around Easter you will almost certainly see people at the roadside selling buckets of these small, red berries. You will find them growing wild, among other places, on the lower slopes of Volcan Osorno.

“If you are accustomed to eating sorrel, wild garlic, wild celery, cress or mint, at home, you can do so here. You can also eat the inner stem of the tussock grass or the tangy leaves of the scurvy grass. Wild celery and cress grow in damp areas, sorrel in sunny meadows and mint everywhere. Try mint tea.

“The climate of southern Chile and Argentina seems to be ideal for fungi. Never have we seen so many varieties – tantalising if you do not know what they all are. The ones we recognised were field mushrooms. If you are a mushroom enthusiast we strongly recommend that you bring your field guide. Most of the fungi in this part of the world are the same as those you find in Europe or North America. We can particularly recommend the giant puffballs that are common in Torres del Paine National Park. We ate them in a variety of ways: fried in sardine oil, mixed with soup, and thinly sliced and dried in the sun, after which they were as crunchy and tasty as potato crisps.”

So should you get lost in the vastness of Argentina you will be able to survive until rescue comes.

## or ARMENIA or—

“One of the glories of medieval Armenian sculpture is the profusion of carved *khachkars* or memorial stones, which are found in their hundreds in graveyards and around the leading monasteries and cathedrals. These slabs are rectangular in shape, the cross motif being carved in relief in the central panel. Often the cross is shown entwined with elaborate interlace carving, suggesting the Tree of Life with its sinuous strands, accompanied by flowers and leaves. Birds and animals abound. Customary types include Christ, the Virgin and Child, angels and saints; sometimes one sees such scenes as Daniel in the lion’s den, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the Nativity and the Baptism of Christ. Inscriptions commemorate the name and family of the deceased, often

complete with date and pious inscription. The variety of the *khachkars* is infinite; even in places like Julfa, where they run into thousands, scarcely any are duplicated by one another.

Some archaic *khachkars* are much simpler, as at Talin, Haridj and Adiaman. These primitive examples have archaic carvings of divine and biblical personages, strongly resembling those found on ancient Irish high crosses, such as can be seen at Clonmacnoise, Kells and elsewhere. Parallels between Armenian and Celtic sculpture and interlaced work have been drawn by several scholars. There seems to be some shadowy evidence of early evangelization of Ireland by monks and missionaries from Armenia. However, it seems more likely that the similarities remarked on arise from a common fund of artistic taste rooted in the people, and a similar naïve and reverent approach to the problems of Christian iconography.

In the modern period, sculpture in the round has made great advances in Armenia. A pioneer in the field was the most eminent of modern masters, Ervand Kochar, creator of the equestrian statue of David of Sassoun. This original and spirited masterpiece rears up in the centre of the square in front of Erevan's main railway station, a fitting symbol of Armenia's national renaissance, and her agelong defiance of her foes."

*Christian Architecture and the Arts.*

Pope John Paul II made a speech to commemorate the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Church. He mentions the Armenian struggle against the Sassanid Yazdegerd II in 451 who wanted to impose the Mazdean religion on Armenia. "From then on, similar events frequently recurred down to the massacres of Armenians from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the tragic events of 1915, when the Armenian people were forced to suffer unprecedented violence whose painful consequences are still visible in the diaspora into which many of their children were forced. ... It is worthy of note that wherever Armenians went they took with them the richness of their moral values and cultural structures ... the Armenian word for "illumination" is enriched by a further meaning, for it also indicates the spread of culture through teaching, entrusted in particular to the monk-teachers who continued St Gregory's Gospel preaching ... For this reason the Armenian Church has always considered the promotion of culture and of the national consciousness as an integral part of her mandate and has always worked to keep this synthesis living and fruitful."

"The Armenian people's heritage of faith and culture has enriched humanity with treasures of art and genius that have now spread throughout the world. Seventeen hundred years of evangelization make this land one of the cradles of Christian civilization, which is revered and admired by all the disciples of the divine Teacher."

Jasmina Trifoni wrote *Places to Visit Before They Disappear*, a grim title, and she includes 'The Ancient City of Ani'. "In spring the plateau that rises up between the modern city of Kars and the Armenian border is blanketed with purple and red flowers" but this area, once part of Armenia now part of Turkey, "was once a battlefield, and in 1915-16 it was the theater of what the Armenians call *Metz Yeghern* or Great Crime, referring to the genocide of their people perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks." Here also are the remains of Ani, a city built on the caravan routes in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Armenian Bagratid dynasty and known as "the city of 1001 churches, the architecture of which was among the most technologically advanced of the time."

"Completed in 1001, the majestic cathedral is an absolute masterpiece. It was built by Trdat, the greatest architect in Armenian history (he supervised the construction in two phases, because when the church was half-finished he was summoned to Constantinople to oversee the reconstruction of the dome of Hagia Sophia, which had collapsed because of an earthquake). His work on the cathedral is remarkable for his innovative use of pointed arches and the cross plan consisting of four clustered piers. These unique features have led scholars to consider the Ani

cathedral the inspiration of the Gothic style, which spread throughout the Western World the following century.”

But Ani was sacked by the Mongols in 1236 and hit by a major earthquake in 1319. It gradually became a ghost city, ‘rediscovered’ by European travelers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But the cathedral and other buildings were allowed to continue to deteriorate, helped along by Turkish soldiers using the cathedral as a shooting range. Finally in 2016 “Ani was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for its artistic and historic worth.”

## AMAZONA

Which is where they have been having a lot of fires. But when I was young quite a lot of kids’ adventure books were set in the Amazon and they came in two kinds: in one intrepid men (the heroes were usually men) slashed their way through jungle vines and around monstrous trees. In the second the Amazon was full of water; the water ran everywhere in creeks and rivers and in between it was a mighty swamp. In one such book a prehistoric monster lived in a giant sinkhole in which the ever-wet ground had given way and taken him down. It wasn’t explained how he had survived without other prehistoric monsters but it was a very exciting book. And somehow the wetness of the Amazon still lurks in my subconscious. The Amazon should not be burning. It should be too wet to burn.

But alas ... once you start clearing forests they begin to dry out.

In *Amazonia & Other Forests of Brazil: Memoirs of a Field Ecologist* Antonio Mendes Pontes writes of the ecology of northern Amazonia but he drew my attention to a different loss. In ‘The Atlantic Forest of North-east Brazil: a Vanishing Treasure’ he writes “My country is one of the two richest countries in the world as far as biodiversity goes and the Atlantic Forest is among the five richest hot spots, and ranks as the earth’s biologically richest and most endangered terrestrial ecoregion. It was once part of an exuberant forest, which stretched almost continuously from the State of Rio Grande do Norte and Ceara, here in north-eastern Brazil, to the very south, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. It covered 1,119,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Brazilian territory, in contrast to a more recent analysis, which shows that not more than 5% remains.

“It has extremely high levels of diversity and endemism, with plant diversity estimated at 20,000 species, including 6,000 endemic to Brazil. Equally high is the number of vertebrates, including 261 species of mammals (160 endemic), 620 birds (73 endemic), 200 reptiles (60 endemic) and 280 amphibians (253 endemic). Looking at primates specifically, twenty-six species are found in the Atlantic Forest of Brazil, of which twenty are endemic.”

Monkeys, squirrels, anteaters, deer, owls, capybaras, snakes, a fascinating mix of animals, but “Hundreds of years of neglect and exploitation, however, has led to the extinction of at least nine species in the wild and has caused dozens of other species to be included on the list of threatened animals. The high level of diversity and endemism by unit area, combined with the fact that so little remains of a forest that is almost as rich as the Amazonia, despite being only one fifth as large, highlights the overwhelming importance of this ecoregion.”

Poverty, land hunger, agriculture, felling for timber, firewood and charcoal, large families, all the usual reasons for destroying forests ate away at the Atlantic forests, leaving them as isolated pockets, and now eat away at the forests of Amazonia. But these same reasons have eaten away at forests everywhere. No country can point to untouched forests. The one hopeful sign to come out of Pontes’ research is an understanding that it is not too late to save some of the Atlantic forest and its amazing creatures, including the recently discovered Blond Capuchin Monkey.

But the will has to be there.

## Or ANDORRA

Rose Macaulay in her novel *Crewe Train* has an English clergyman and his daughter seeking refuge from ... “But there was a worse thing. The English came.

“Here is one of the points about this planet which should be remembered; into every penetrable corner of it, and into most of the impenetrable corners, the English will penetrate. They are like that; born invaders. They cannot stay at home. So that even in the desert heat of hottest Africa you shall see little wigwams bearing the legend ‘Grand Hotel of London. Five o’clock tea,’ and if you visit the Arctic regions, you shall find Esquimaux infants babbling broken Anglo-Saxon, and huts inscribed W.C. Every train running over the globe is full of them, and the world’s roads, plains and mountains are dense with knapsacked British walkers, burnt brick-red by sun and air.

“Yes; the English will go everywhere.”

So “He (Mr Dobie, the clergyman) took counsel with himself, wondering whether there was any place to which the English did not go, or, at any rate, went less. He paid visits of investigation to the other Balearics, but Iviza and Minorca he found full of British archaeologists, and the smaller islands were so extremely small as to herd disagreeably together those who lived on them.

“At last, studying a map of Europe, he discovered the republic of Andorra, in the eastern Pyrenees; inquiring about it, he ascertained that it was very difficult of access, being snow-bound from November to May and mountainous all the year round, and that the approach to it was by mule.

“So, reluctant, but seeing nothing else for it, Mr Dobie and his daughter left their beautiful island home and made for this ancient mountain republic, and took up their abode in an old farmhouse which they found on the bleak hill above Andorra town.

“Certainly it was cold there, but also certainly it was, on the whole, peaceful and lonely. The Andorrans, though sociable (for all nations are this), were not nearly so sociable as the Mallorquins; and the English, though they came there sometimes (as they always will), did not come often and did not stay long.”

Now, of course, you do not enter Andorra by mule, unless you are an eccentric who only travels by mule, but the English come and go in much larger numbers.

“Madrid itself is Europe’s highest capital, if you don’t count Andorra la Vella—and really, who counts Andorra la Vella?”

Michael Paterniti in *The Telling Room*.

That suggests a very good reason for going there and I saw the Tour de France looping through Andorra so you can undoubtedly go there by bicycle—if you have strong legs.

## And the ALEUTIANS

Excuse me while I just check. I am not sure if they are closest to Alaska or to Canada ... and I’m not sure who owns them. I read somewhere that Robert Hunter wrote *The Greenpeace Chronicle* about the Aleutians. But I haven’t yet tracked it down. Instead I came upon the information that Dashiell Hammet was stationed there in WW2 so it suggested they belong to the US. Dan Van Der Vat in *The Pacific Campaign* wrote “There remained for the Japanese, after the failure of MO and MI, only Operation AL. The Aleutians, with their wild climate and inhospitable, rough terrain covered in tundra, extend into the unfriendly North Pacific as forerunners (or afterthoughts) to Alaska. They were to be taken by the Northern Area Force, commanded by Vice-Admiral Hosogaya Boshiro of the Fifth Fleet. The Second Mobile Force, of Admiral Kakuta Kakuji, would cover occupation forces for Adak and Attu plus Kiska. ... Twenty-five people were killed on the ground, and some installations damaged, for the loss of two Japanese aircraft. ... An Army detachment of twelve hundred men was landed on Attu on the night of 6-7 June. There was no

resistance, and forty-one people, nearly all Aleuts, were taken prisoner. Kiska was taken on the early afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup> by the 350 men of a Special Naval Landing Force. The small staff of a US weather station were taken prisoner. ... Americans were most upset by the occupation of two of their islands (of which hardly anyone had previously heard), and the Japanese were correspondingly satisfied.”

“The Japanese capture of the Aleutian Islands was rendered pointless by the pivotal American victory at Midway. Instead of forming the last link in a new, forward-defense perimeter, the dismal islands were an isolated outpost of no strategic value to Japan but difficult to maintain – and a standing offense to the Americans until they could be recovered. These were not colonies like Guam but United States soil, part and parcel of the territory of Alaska, as critics never tired of reminding the government.”

“On 11 May the first waves of two thousand US troops went ashore on the south side of Attu in Massacre Bay – happily a misnomer, as there were no Japanese yet to be seen, and near Holz Bay to the north. The Japanese garrison of twenty-six hundred men was concentrated between the two bays at the eastern end of the island and soon made its presence felt. The Americans deployed eleven thousand men against them and took until 29 May to eradicate the resistance, which ended with a suicide charge by a thousand screaming Japanese. ... The Americans spent the next two and a half months pounding Kiska preparatory to invading it. ... They began landing on the 15<sup>th</sup>, after an almighty bombardment, and were all ashore in two days. Unfortunately they had ignored a suggestion from Major General Holland M. Smith, USMC, that a scouting party be sent ashore first by boat to assess the likely opposition. Had they done so they might have found out sooner that Admiral Kawasa had sent in Rear Admiral Kimura Shofuku on 28 July to lift the entire garrison of fifty-two hundred and take it home. Even though they waited for fog, this took courage under the constant pressure from massive American air raids, which had made the garrison’s last weeks unbearable. This was a small but spectacular addition to the list of brilliant military evacuations of the Second World War ... If the American commanders at Kiska felt foolish when they discovered that the nut had been whisked away before the sledgehammer struck, they thoroughly deserved to. The useless occupation of the Aleutians, ended by an invasion of empty space, cost the Japanese twenty-four hundred troops, three destroyers, six submarines and nine merchantmen. But North America had been divested of its miniscule Japanese irritant, whatever the cost in wasted effort and lost pride.”

The islands must have been ‘dismal’ after occupation and bombardment but are they naturally ‘dismal’? In the serendipitous way some things happen the very next day I came upon Spike Walker’s *Working on the Edge* about fishing Alaskan waters for king crab. He places them on the map. “Some 1,600 miles wide and 760 miles tall, the Bering Sea is almost 900,000 endless square miles of water. She is bordered by the Aleutian Islands to the south, the Alaska mainland to the north and east, and the Soviet Union to the west.” And: “Studded with volcanic peaks, both active and dead, Unimak Island is seventy-five miles long and twenty miles wide. The first island in the Aleutian Islands chain, it stretched across our charts in the broad angular shape of a peanut.” (I have never thought of peanuts as being ‘angular’ but perhaps American peanuts are different?)

“As the strike persisted, hundreds of crewmen were left with plenty of time on their hands, and I took full advantage of it. Throughout the long and wet winter months, there were few harsher and bleaker places on earth than the Aleutian Islands. But now, in summer, the brown and barren landscape became a virtual garden spot. It was a time when tender green shoots of sedge grass and bog grass pushed up through the dead brown layer of winterkill and sprouted. In the direct glare of a midday sun, the rich green color of the grassy hills was blinding. And a hike out into the countryside took one through dazzling islands of sun-yellow buttercups and purple lupine flowers blossoming wide in the long summer light.”

“As we neared False Pass, we learned that for the first time in decades it had frozen over. So we steered clear of the shortcut and began the eighteen-hour journey around Unimak Island, an island laced with volcanos such as Mt. Pogromni and Mt. Shishaldin.

“When we reached the westernmost tip of Unimak Pass, from here, the Aleutian Islands stretched westward toward the Soviet Union’s Kamchatka Peninsula in a sweeping arch of islands more than a thousand miles in length. Next, we passed Cape Sarichef, a famous point of land that overlooks some of the worst waters on earth. Old timers referred to this stretch of water as the “Isle of Lost Ships.” It was here that “on April 1, 1946, the largest tsunami ever to strike the North American continent came ashore.” When it came ashore at Cape Sarichef the “five coast guardsmen asleep in the lighthouse more than one hundred feet above the sea probably never knew what hit them as the concrete lighthouse and much of its foundation were torn up and swept away by the killer wave.” And then there was the time that thousands of birds, possibly mutton birds, crashed into his boat, drawn by its bright lights.

And there were unexpected glimpses of beauty. “Outside, cruel arctic winds were swooping down from the snow-covered peaks of the Aleutian Range, which rose some nine thousand feet into the darkness above us. ... These williwaw winds increased to nearly ninety knots as they were compressed into the steep passes. They descended almost vertically, and when they emerged from the darkness and struck the flat black plate of comparatively warm thirty-nine-degree seawater, a thick layer of ice steam arose.

“It was a fascinating and eerie display. Like vapor rising from wet pavement, steam appeared to be literally boiling out of the black bay water. Alone on watch, suspended in my leathery seat some twenty feet above the water, I watched the white vaporous forms rise up on all sides. They sprang up and twisted about with incredible speed, engulfing our vessel in a strange Dantesque world of demon figures and swirling steam. Here and there, I could see tiny wind devils spinning across the bay like miniature tornadoes, while tendrils of steam danced up and around the hulk of the *Rondys* like spirit apparitions, dusting her windows and wheelhouse in thin sheaths of ice.”

And then there was the beauty of the Northern Lights above. “The aurora borealis flitted and jumped in iridescent bars, like rainbows shattering in space. And from one instant to the next, they coated the twinkling heavens in transparent sheets of blowtorch greens and gaslight blues, then washed them clean with a leaping jolt of diamond white before veiling them again in rich tones of roseate red.” ... “It was a silent and heavenly orchestration, and as we watched, the stars seemed to toss from side to side as our ship rolled gently beneath us.”

But then the king crabs crashed. 150 million pounds were taken in 1980, 30 million pounds in 1981, 10 million in 1982. And in 1983 the season was cancelled. It is a common story. But are there other reasons which might take you to the Aleutian Islands? A summer visit surely beckons?

## Ais also for ARRAS

“By March Charles had marched with his men to Arras, where secret tunneling on a massive scale was going on beneath the seemingly quiet place. As an ancient town with Roman origins Arras had tunnels and sewers – known as *boves* – running beneath the streets, and the countryside between the British and German positions was full of underground caves, from where chalk had been quarried during the Middle Ages, some of which were cathedral-sized caverns. The Allied Command decided that if they could link these various subterranean holes in secret, an entire army would be able to move safely from the front to the rear of the German positions, and attack from behind.

“Until then, tunneling had merely been used by both sides to detonate explosives under enemy lines: here it would take on a different purpose. It was a hugely ambitious plan, and 500 men of the New Zealand Tunnelling company – all professional miners – set to work with a battalion of

‘Bantams,’ short Yorkshire miners below the Army’s minimum height of 5 foot 3 inches. In a matter of months, they had created two interconnected labyrinths, 12 miles long, capable of hiding 25,000 troops, with electric lighting provided by its own small powerhouse, as well as kitchens, latrines, and a medical centre with a fully equipped operating theatre.”

And the tunnels are still there. The *Lonely Planet Guide to France* says that Arras “is worth seeing mainly for its harmonious ensemble of Flemish-style arcaded buildings.” And “Arras’ two market squares, place des Héros and the Grand’ Place, are surrounded by 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish-baroque houses, especially handsome at night. Although they vary in decorative detail, their 345 sandstone columns form a common arcade unique in France.” “But for a truly unique perspective on Arras, head into the slimy souterrains (tunnels). Also known as *boves* (cellars), they run under place des Héros and were turned into British command posts, hospitals and barracks during WW1. Each spring, in a brilliant juxtaposition of underground gloom and horticultural extravagance, plants and flowers turn the tunnels into the lush, creative, life-affirming Jardin des Boves” which you can take a tour of each spring. Then there is Wellington Quarry, a 20m-deep network of old chalk quarries expanded during WW1 by tunnellers from New Zealand. Hour-long guided tours in French and English combine imaginative audiovisuals, evocative photos and period items.”

Arras is a starting point for tours of the Somme battlefields. “Before the world went to war in 1914 the River Somme was a minor placid waterway of northern France. It meandered gently through Picardy, through a broad valley; westwards and northwards towards the English Channel. Men fished on its banks. Lovers nestled in the reeds, and punts slipped in and out of the complicated channels. On the uplands to either side villages lay in the folds of the undulating slopes. A contented, canny breed of peasants made an adequate living from the land and from rich, productive orchards. It was a countryside of singular rural beauty, not unlike parts of Hampshire. The Somme watered it all; the fat orchards, the rich cornfields, the marshy meadows. Rows of tall sentinel poplars lined the Route Nationale. Carts creaked down the lanes to Bapaume, Thiepval, and Albert. Life was a matter of sowing, reaping, and gathering the harvest; of apple-picking, of children’s laughter, of fish hiding near the banks, of the sound of church bells drifting over the valleys on still Sunday mornings. It was not the most well-known area in France. Few visitors came upon it. Many local families had never left it, had never seen the sea, and had visited Paris only once in a generation.

“The uplands were almost solid chalk, and from them the view extended for up to three miles. On some of the slopes were several thick woods. On Sunday afternoons young couples would stroll shyly into the woods called Delville and Mametz ...”

...  
“Mud, which was of a glutinous variety owing to the clay, balled on the soles of boots to the size of a football, making every step a vile torture. Men died from the effort of carrying messages; many died from slow drowning in mud; whole units disappeared; wounded were often suffocated in the mire before stretcher bearers could get to them. Because of the ceaseless shelling there was nothing that could be done to improve the situation. There was not a building or tree standing for miles. Nature’s equation of grass and vegetation that counteracted the heavy rainfall had all been destroyed.”

*The Big Push* by Brian Gardner.

And the mud is a perennial in writings about the War ...

*Somme Mud: An Australian Teenager in the First World War* was written by Pte. Edward Lynch and edited by Will Davies. (Lynch came home 1919, married Yvonne Peters, they had 5 children, and he wrote the story in pencil in school exercise books in the 1930s but perhaps understandably he couldn’t find a publisher. It was finally published in 2006 long after his death.)

Lynch was unsurprisingly obsessed by the mud but he also mentions Ypres, the sad town which gave so many Australian readers of the war news great difficulty in deciding how to pronounce it.

He wrote of “the black, clinging Somme mud, that awful Somme mud that so clung to tired legs”. And “It’s the end of the 1916-17 winter and the conditions are almost unbelievable. We live in a world of Somme mud. We sleep in it, work in it, fight in it, wade in it and many of us die in it. We see it, feel it, eat it and curse it, but we can’t escape it, not even by dying.”

“On through Delville Wood, once a large forest, but now just a mass of jagged, torn stumps upon which the blood of friend and foe has intermingled. Not a whole tree is left standing as shell fire has reaped the lot. The wood is crisscrossed by lines of trenches, taken and retaken. Report says that eight thousand South Africans have been killed here and thousands of British and Fritz too, no doubt. Even now, dead men can be seen every few yards. Devil’s Wood indeed!”

“Is it over for the women who wait and pray and are doomed to long, lonely years ahead with nothing but a memory to cherish and nothing but that memory to comfort them along the road they had so hoped to tread with their soldier boy? Is it over for the kiddies who’ll face life handicapped in so many ways by the loss of their daddy?”

“We’re living, or rather existing in the dirty damp billets of the shell-torn, rat-infested shambles that once was the French town of Dernancourt. This place has changed hands more than once in the fluctuating fortunes of war and is little more than a spot on a map, but what wealth of blood has been spilt here in its various fights! and how we hate this hole, its dirty dilapidated dwellings, remains of sheds and damp, foul-smelling cellars which house our battalion. We’re as mud-stained, wet and weary as the place itself.”

“Somehow we can’t keep our eyes off these poor devils for they aren’t men but mere boys of no more than fifteen. Fear-stains are on many of their boyish faces. Tears of fear. Boys thrown into what even hardened men can barely stand. We’ve often been inclined to laugh at prisoners, sometimes we’ve abused the poor down-hearted wretches, but now we’re full of pity for these poor lads called upon to do the jobs that men should not be asked to do.

The boys seem afraid of us because of what they have been told about the treatment of prisoners; propaganda designed to make them afraid to surrender.

An old runner is speaking: ‘I’ve got three boys at home as old as these fellows. It should be absolutely illegal to put boys like that in the line. Enough to sicken anyone of the war!’ ”

And those taken—“Many of them are just kids; poor, frightened, skinny little codgers of fifteen to seventeen, a pathetic sight in their big, round, silver-rimmed spectacles. Clad in men’s uniforms that flap all over their under-nourished young bodies, there’s nothing of the man about them — except the rifle they’ve flung away.”

Mud. It features in so many books about the Western Front. But at least the mud is now covered again by grass, trees, and crops. And something of the beauty of old towns like Arras ...

## B. B is for BOURKE

When I was young ‘back of Bourke’ was like Woop Woop or ‘Beyond the Black Stump’. Nobody could tell us where the Black Stump actually was or why it was black but Bourke certainly sat on the map to be found by all and sundry.

For instance, the *Lonely Planet Guide to Sydney & New South Wales* says, “Immortalised for Australians in the expression ‘back of Bourke’, that is anything remote, this easy-going town on the Darling River sits right on the edge of the outback. Beyond Bourke, green pastoral lands stop abruptly, settlements are few and the country is flat, brown and alluring. Bourke itself is gorgeous,

historic and quaint, sprawled along its beautiful river with its river gums and water birds. Besides, the space is exhilarating, and the very remoteness attractive.”

They go on to say “The Ngemba people lived in a large area centred on the Brewarrina Fisheries – a series of stone traps on the Darling River – including Bourke and Louth. The first Europeans to see this area were in Charles Sturt’s party of 1828. Sturt was unenthusiastic about the country but by 1860 there were enough grazier settlers for a paddle-wheeler to risk the difficult journey up to Bourke; it was possible for wool leaving here to be in London in just six weeks.

Bourke is still a major wool-producing area, but droughts and low prices have forced farmers to look to products such as cotton and rock melons. There’s even a vineyard.”

And I was interested to read that “Fred Hollows, the ophthalmic surgeon and hero for his philanthropic work in developing countries, chose to be buried here in the ‘land without fences’.”

Bourke is certainly named for Governor Bourke but does anyone know who coined the phrase ‘back of Bourke’?

but equally could be for

## BUNDABERG

Francis Ratcliffe in *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand* (1948) says: “The main street of Bundaberg is straight and very broad. I was never quite certain of its name, for it is called by some Bourbon Street, and by others Bourbon. I thought that the latter variation was merely a mistake in pronunciation until I heard from someone or other the following tale. The street was originally christened “Boorbong”, an aboriginal word meaning dead kangaroo. Boorbong or Bourbon. It remained, until sensitiveness and civic pride grew up in the town, and a section of the community began to think that the name “Dead Kangaroo” (be it only an unintelligible aboriginal one) hardly befitted the dignity of their main thoroughfare. So a movement was started to turn the dead roo into a line of French kings, just as dead. ... I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this yarn, but I hope it is true.”

He wrote that in 1948 so I wondered: what is the name of Bundaberg’s main street now?

In fact it is Bourbon. So as you sip your Bundaberg Ginger Beer on Bourbon Street you can reflect on dead kangaroos and French kings and enjoy the world going by ...

## OR BIAK

Biak Island, unfortunately, has mainly entered our consciousness through reports of Indonesian soldiers killing dozens of islanders. It was also a scene of heavy fighting in WW2. Lt-General Robert Eichelberger in *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo* called a chapter ‘Biak: Battle of the Caves’: “Americans who fought at Biak, just off the coast of upper New Guinea, remember that sun-baked island as something as unreal and frightening as Conan Doyle’s “Lost World.” The geography was scarred and pitted by the accidents of nature’s past, and some of the cliffs and limestone terraces along its southern shore seemed as barren as the mountains of the moon.

“Biak is an island of innumerable caves—caves with the dimensions of a narrow dark hallway, caves as deep and large as five-story tenement buildings and with as many levels of connecting galleries, caves with weird stalactite and stalagmite formations reminiscent of the Carlsbad Caverns of New Mexico. It is also an island of subterranean streams, and scarce (and evil-tasting) surface water. Soldiers fought for the precious water holes, and more than one American died as he crawled forward in the night to replenish his canteen.

“The mystery of Biak’s caves is probably explained by volcanic upthrusts. Long ago busy coral built beneath the sea, and rainbow fish swam through the tunnels and mazes which later housed hundreds of men. Repeated volcanic convulsions in forgotten eras lifted the coral formations

and water-made faults until some of them were two hundred feet or more above the sea where they originated. Then we came.

“An American task force built around the 41<sup>st</sup> Division landed at Biak on May 27, 1944, and discovered the Japanese had established themselves both on the cliffs overlooking the beaches and in invincible underground fortresses. The Japanese had been on the island only a few months but their explorations had been thorough. They had located and staked claim to an intricate subterranean network with many secret places of ingress and egress. These widely scattered caverns were altogether absent from our maps. A full month before our arrival (captured records indicate our invasion was anticipated) the Japanese proceeded to exploit their knowledge. They took every advantage of nature’s fantasies, and with foresight and able engineering constructed themselves an island stronghold with a considerable claim to impregnability.

“General Fuller, who led the Biak task force, called at my Lake Sentani headquarters shortly before his departure. In a general discussion of the situation facing him, Fuller expressed some apprehension. It is not an easy matter to lead a division on one full-dress amphibious expedition, and then, in five or six weeks’ time, to prepare that division for another. Fuller was also concerned about the size of his force. Only two combat regiments had been assigned to the landing.”

This proved totally inadequate. The Japanese had explored and knew the caves that honeycombed the island. “Colonel Bill Bowen, my operations officer, and his assistants risked their lives on tours of exploration and discovery. For several days, in unarmed Cub planes, they flew repeatedly over the Japanese positions at low altitudes until they sighted and charted the entrances to the enemy’s unbelievable underworld. There were the East Caves directly above Mokmer Village, and there were the caves, farther down the coast, at the Ibdi Pocket. ... Most important of all, however, were the West Caves. (We referred to these as The Sump.) Although we did not know it then, Colonel Kuzume had his headquarters there, it was the arterial center, the heart, of the Japanese defenses. As long as The Sump was occupied, the airstrips were neutralized.” They had ammunition, supplies, generators, even wooden floors and houses above the damp floors. “There were several frontal entrances to the West Caves. There was also the main sump itself. This was a pothole about eighty feet deep and a hundred feet across. Once it had been a cave, but the roof of earth had worn away and the great hole was open to daylight. Down at the bottom were the caverns which led off to the underground maze. There was another pothole in the immediate region which fascinated me. It was at least a hundred feet deep and so narrow that it had the appearance of a deep well.”

It was in these extraordinary conditions that the fighting took place. The Allies wanted Biak as one of their staging-posts to the Philippines, along with Hollandia and Noemfoor.

“Unknown to us, Colonel Kuzume had conceded defeat in the early morning hours of June 22. He assembled his officers around him and ordered all able-bodied soldiers to leave the caves and launch a final counterattack. He distributed hand grenades to the wounded so that they might destroy themselves. In an impressive ceremonial, he burned all documents and the regimental flag. Then, in the Samurai tradition, he knelt and disemboweled himself with his own warrior’s sword.”

“We didn’t enter the Sump Caves for several days and continued to belabor them with explosives. But we knew we had won the fight there. When we did enter the caves on June 27 the stench of the dead was insupportable. Bullets, grenades, gasoline, TNT—each had done its work. It was hopeless in that almost unimaginable purgatory even to attempt an accurate count of bodies. They littered almost every square foot of ground. There were a few of the living still in the far recesses.

“This is no place to examine the unfathomable mysteries of Japanese tactics. The near-invulnerability of the cave positions at Biak made our task most difficult and disagreeable. But the decision of Kuzume to stick to a set plan of battle made our victory inevitable. After the task force struck through inland to Mokmer drome, the Ibdi and Mokmer caves were isolated and had only

nuisance value. Kuzume, instead of summoning the troops out of the pockets and opposing us with a strong united force, permitted us to reduce their positions piecemeal. I, of course, am glad he was of that mind.

“Our mission accomplished, my orders now called for return of I Corps staff to Hollandia on June 28. Reports of that date show approximately twenty-eight hundred Japanese killed in action and thirteen taken prisoner; only one prisoner was a combat soldier. Not all caves had been reduced when I took my departure, and there were still many Japanese in the north of the island. But the victory had been won. There was little more organized resistance.

“No one who fought the Battle of the Caves, I suspect, will ever forget the taste of the melted-coral water. Or the suspicion that melted Japanese were in the streams tapped for our canteens. ... The water contamination at Biak was real. I suppose our chlorine tablets (add chlorine to the melted-coral taste and you have something almost unpotable) saved us all from sickness. The American authorities later removed the whole native population and returned them only when Army engineers, after exhaustive tests, took oath that Biak’s shallow water table was once more free of pollution.”

But the villagers came home to thousands of skeletons to rebuild their normal lives. For people who believed deeply and sincerely in ghosts this cannot have been easy.

“General Douglas MacArthur had other things on his mind, specifically his new war plan, ‘Reno IV,’ calling for a mighty six-hundred-mile leapfrog along the northern New Guinea coast to Hollandia, a large step in the right direction, toward the jumping-off point at the western end, for the invasion of his cherished Philippines. Hollandia looked like a good spot to build a base for long-range heavy bombers in aid of the Philippines operations.”

“Operation Persecution was to seize Aitape, more than a hundred miles east of Hollandia, at the same time as the latter, so that fighters could fly from there to help the main landing. Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger, corps commander, had two divisions, the 41<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, for the undertaking. ... After all that, Hollandia proved to be useless for heavy bombers because its soil was too soft. MacArthur had already moved on, ordering the invasion of Wakde, 250 miles farther west along the coast, on 17 May. The local airfield was taken in two days and was in operational use by the Americans on the third, but hard fighting developed when Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, MacArthur’s Sixth Army (Alamo Force) commander, ordered an attack on the nearby town of Sarmi, which happened to be the local Japanese military headquarters of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division (Lieutenant General Tagami Hachiro). Although the Americans won control of the area, the Japanese were not cleared from Sarmi itself until the war was over.

“Next came Biak, an island with three airfields dominating Geelvink Bay, north of the neck of western New Guinea, which ends in the Vogelkop (‘bird’s head’) Peninsula and Cape Sansapor, designated jumping-off point for the Philippines. Major General Fuller’s 41<sup>st</sup> Division landed on Biak in the misnamed Operation Hurricane on 27 May and ran into a very fierce defense conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Kuzume Naoyuki, complete with bunkers, a maze of pillboxes and even tanks, rarely mustered by the Japanese in the Pacific theater, especially at this stage of the war. Despite Krueger’s dismissal of Fuller in deference to MacArthur’s frustration, and the temporary substitution (after three weeks) of Eichelberger in the field command, the equivalent of three battalions of scratch Japanese troops held off one and a half American divisions for a whole month. The Japanese had recognized the capture of Biak as a threat to their position in Mindanao (Philippines) and their new plan for a ‘decisive battle’ against the American fleet in the area, and had decided to send in the Second Amphibious Brigade of the Southern Army’s strategic reserve from Mindanao by Tokyo Express. This Operation Kon was to be covered by warships and naval air reinforcements from the Philippines, the Marianas, and even Japan itself, on the orders of IGHQ (Navy). Aerial fights and naval skirmishes on the Solomon Islands model, ensued, badly disrupting

the persistent Japanese attempts to save Biak. The third and largest reinforcement effort by transports, involving an overwhelming escort of the two super-battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi* with appropriate support, was called off at the last minute when the ‘decisive naval battle’ loomed, which was very lucky indeed for the Americans in New Guinea. From now on, fresh Japanese troops arrived in small numbers by barge at night, adding perhaps a thousand men piecemeal to the garrison.

“The last-ditch defense of Biak was conducted in and from two caves which commanded and fired upon the captured main airfield, preventing its use by the Americans. When the eastern cave was abandoned to relentless bombing and flamethrower attacks on 28 June, Naoyuki ordered his colors burned and committed suicide. When the time came to withdraw from the western cave, a hundred wounded men gave up their lives in a final stand, which enabled the last 150 unwounded defenders to escape. All the other Japanese soldiers were dead, compared with 438 Americans killed and twenty-four hundred wounded. The Americans took even higher casualties from virulent tropical intestinal diseases. At the end of June, Krueger completed the capture of the island of Numfoor, sixty miles west of Biak, aided by massive air bombardment and a parachute drop. Within a month, the Vogelkop Peninsula was under American control. The last step by MacArthur’s forces before the invasion of the Philippines was an unopposed landing in mid-September on the island of Morotai, at the northern end of the Moluccan Archipelago, halfway between New Guinea and Mindanao.”

“The Armada that was to return Douglas MacArthur to the Philippines was the strongest in the history of the world with 157 combat ships and 581 other vessels of the Seventh Fleet protected by the 106 warships of Halsey’s Third Fleet. The Seventh Fleet assembled at the sweltering ports of Hollandia, New Guinea (Northern Transport Group), and Manus in the Admiralties (Southern).”

*The Pacific Campaign* by Dan Van Der Vat

A friend of my brother’s went exploring in the caves many years later and picked up a small jade Buddha which he gave to his wife. She later had it valued at \$30,000. I wonder what else lies there undiscovered among the remains of that wartime carnage. And if there is anything else valuable I hope the Biak people rather than the Indonesians can benefit ...

## Cis for CHARLESTON

“Spring in Charleston, South Carolina, is a resplendent affair, and by the beginning of April, it is always well under way. The azaleas, camellias, hyacinths, early-blooming magnolias, and forsythias, as if competing for attention, all contribute to the riot of color and fragrance. And on this particular day, as the sun prepared to rise, there was the promise that it would be glorious for almost everyone in this scenic, historic town. Everyone, that is, except for Carl Vandermeer, a successful young lawyer who had grown up in nearby West Ashley.

“Most mornings, regardless of the time of the year but particularly in the springtime, Carl would be part of a sizable group of joggers who ran along the Battery, which was located at the southern tip of Charleston’s peninsula. The Battery fronted that portion of the expansive Charleston Harbor formed by the confluence of the Cooper and the Ashley Rivers. Lined with restored nineteenth-century mansions and boasting a public garden, the Battery was one of the city’s most attractive and popular locales.

“Like most of his fellow runners, Carl lived in the immediate and charming residential neighborhood known to the locals as SOB, the acronym for “South of Broad.” Broad Street was a thoroughfare that ran east to west across the Charleston peninsula between the two rivers.”

Robin Cook in *Host*.

I remember reading a book called *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. I am not

sure how the people of Charleston felt about such a title. But I am sure they would have no objection to *Southern Interiors of Charleston, South Carolina* by Samuel and Narcissa Chamberlain.

They say, “Charleston was founded on its present site shortly after 1669, under a grant from King Charles II. The Carolinas, a tract then stretching presumably to the Pacific Ocean, were given to a group of the King’s favorites, known as the Lords Proprietors, to colonize and exploit as they wished. Planters came here from the Barbados; French Huguenots arrived seeking religious freedom; and in time groups of other nationalities landed, among them English Puritans, Germans, Dutch, Scotch-Irish and Swiss.”

Was Charles II aware that this land was already owned? Or did he see it as his idea of terra nullius?

“The colonists were soon protesting the rule of the overbearing Lords Proprietors who turned deaf ears to their complaints and ignored their protests against injustices. In 1719 the revolt was complete and the colony became a province of the Crown. A class of prosperous planters grew up in this romantic Low Country, so well suited to the cultivation of rice and, in some parts, of indigo and cotton. These wealthy families maintained close relations with the mother country and usually sent their sons to be educated in English schools and universities. They became a power within the colony, contributing many statesmen, soldiers, ambassadors and governors to its history.”

As you may have intuited, these wealthy families mostly depended on slave labour to make their money. Not all of them. “At the bend where old Church Street widens into a brief tree-shaded area, stands the George Eveleigh House, older than many of its neighbors and probably built in 1738. George Eveleigh was a merchant of the early days who made much of his fortune from the deerskin trade with the Indians.”

And what of the interiors themselves? They say of the William Gibbes house: “The great ballroom on the second floor is a breath-taking sight. The light of its many windows reflects iridescently from the immense Aubusson carpet to the high, coved ceiling, and the magnificent chandelier glitters with a fountain-spray of crystal. The walls are a warm grey, the curtains gold damask, the brocaded furniture pale rose and blue. At the end of the room stands an old English harp made by Sebastien Eraros of London. The elaborately decorated Venetian harpsichord was once owned by Lady Barrington, who is said to have persuaded Paderewski to play upon it. The ceiling was recently redecorated in pure Adam style, with plaster medallions and corner fans touched with gold. The chairs and sofas are French Louis XVI, the portraits are by Sully, the mirrors are 18<sup>th</sup>-century English. Though the ensemble is international, it is probably Charleston’s most perfectly harmonious example of Adam decoration in the grand manner.”

I find it hard to believe that people actually *live* in such houses but if you go to Charleston you will find some of its beautiful interiors open to the public.

## COVENTRY.

Rebecca Mead in *The Road to Middlemarch* said of modern Coventry, “My train rumbled into Coventry, and after I left the station I set off towards the city centre. I could see from my map that there was a park, Greyfriars Green, through which I needed to pass, but to reach it I had to navigate a tangle of roads and pedestrian walkways under and alongside a busy ring road that encircles the city. This ring road was built in the 1960s according to the latest urban-planning principles, as was much of the contemporary city centre. Coventry has a very old foundation—it is thought to have been the site of a Roman settlement, and then a Saxon nunnery, centuries before its most celebrated resident, Lady Godiva, endowed a monastery there in 1043. In the first decades of the twentieth century it became an important centre of car and then aeroplane manufacturing, which explains why, on the night of 14 November 1940, German air forces unleashed an incendiary bombardment upon it. More than five hundred people were killed and much of the city centre was

destroyed, including the fourteenth-century cathedral, which was reduced to a charred shell.”

Michael Smith in *Station X: The Codebreakers of Bletchly Park* writes: “A new Enigma system, nicknamed Brown by Hut 6, began to appear on a communications link between a German experimental research establishment working on navigational beams and a *Luftwaffe* base in France that was using them to direct the German bombing raids on Britain. Professor Frederick ‘Bimbo’ Norman of Hut 3 called in R. V. Jones, who later credited the material produced from the Brown cypher with playing a major role in helping him to devise countermeasures to the various beams.

“Meanwhile, the Red cypher was providing indications of potential German targets and the numbers of aircraft involved in the raids, helped by the Germans considerate use of covernames that began with the same letters as the British towns they were supposed to represent, such as *Bild* for Birmingham and *Liebe* for Liverpool.

“While this was a clear error on the part of the Germans, the failure to recognise one of these covernames was to embroil the Bletchley Park codebreakers in the controversy as to whether or not Churchill allowed the devastating bombing raid on Coventry in mid-November 1940 to go ahead rather than risk letting the Germans know that Enigma had been broken.

“The earliest signs of an unusually large raid came in a decrypt on the Brown cypher revealing that the beams were to be used for an operation which the Germans codenamed ‘Moonlight Sonata’, because it was to coincide with a full moon. It gave no further information other than providing a list of four possible targets, all in London and the Home Counties, leading air intelligence to conclude that the target was once again London.

“Evidence obtained from a captured *Luftwaffe* pilot gave warning of a major raid due to take place at a full moon; the interrogation report said the raid was codenamed ‘Moonshine Serenade’ and was aimed against Coventry and Birmingham. The Air Ministry dismissed this information, preferring to believe its own analysis of the German message. It also disregarded navigational beams aimed at the West Midlands, assuming that they were part of German trials of the equipment which had been going on for some time.

“It was only later that anyone realised that the use of the previously unknown codeword *Korn*, the German word for corn, in the initial message was in fact the covername for Coventry, which the Germans spelt with a K. While with hindsight the Air Ministry’s dismissal of Coventry as a potential target is evidence of the poor coordination of intelligence within Whitehall at the time, it was certainly not ignored to protect the codebreakers’ secret.”

Lord Tennyson called a poem ‘Godiva’ which begins:

*I waited for the train at Coventry;  
I hung with grooms and porters on the bridge,  
To watch the three tall spires; and there I shaped  
The city’s ancient legend into this:—*

Not only we, the latest seed of Time,  
New men, that in the flying of a wheel  
Cry down the past, not only we, that prate  
Of rights and wrongs, have loved the people well,  
And loathed to see them overtax’d; but she  
Did more, and underwent, and overcame,  
The woman of a thousand summers back,  
Godiva, wife to that grim Earl, who ruled  
In Coventry: for when he laid a tax  
Upon his town, and all the mothers brought  
Their children, clamouring, ‘If we pay, we starve!’

She sought her lord, and found him, where he strode  
 About the hall, among his dogs, alone,  
 His beard a foot before him, and his hair  
 A yard behind. She told him of their tears,  
 And pray'd him, 'If they pay this tax, they starve.'  
 Whereat he stared, replying, half-amazed,  
 'You would not let your little finger ache  
 For such as *these*?'—'But I would die,' said she.  
 He laugh'd, and swore by Peter and by Paul:  
 Then fillip'd at the diamond in her ear;  
 'Oh ay, ay, ay, you talk!'—'Alas!' she said,  
 'But prove me what it is I would not do.'  
 And from a heart as rough as Esau's hand,  
 He answer'd, 'Ride you naked thro' the town,  
 And I repeal it;' and nodding, as in scorn,  
 He parted, with great strides among his dogs,  
     So left alone, the passions of her mind,  
 As winds from all the compass shift and blow,  
 Made war upon each other for an hour,  
 Till pity won. She sent a herald forth,  
 And bade him cry, with sound of trumpet, all  
 The hard condition; but that she would loose  
 The people: therefore, as they loved her well,  
 From then till noon no foot should pace the street,  
 No eye look down, she passing; but that all  
 Should keep within, door shut, and window barr'd.

So she disrobes and rides through the town on her palfry and of course there are people willing to peep. It doesn't matter, "but even then she gain'd  
 Her bower; whence reissuing, robed and crown'd,  
 To meet her lord, she took the tax away  
 And built herself an everlasting name.

But Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* queries part of the story. "The story of Lady Godiva, as recorded by Roger of Wendover, a St. Albans chronicler, in the thirteenth century, is that shortly before the Norman Conquest the Saxon Lady Godiva (Godgifu) asked her husband Leofric Earl of Mercia to relieve the people of Coventry from oppressive tolls. He consented on condition that she rode naked through the crowded market on a fair-day; and she did so with a knight on either side, but preserved her modesty by covering herself with her hair, so that only her 'very white legs' showed underneath. The story, which is also told of the Countess of Hereford and 'King John' in connexion with the distribution of bread and cheese at St. Briavel's in Gloucestershire, cannot be historically true, because Coventry in Lady Godiva's day was a village without either tolls or fairs. But it is certain that in 1040 she persuaded Leofric to build and endow a Benedictine monastery at Coventry, and what seems to have happened is that after the Conquest the monks disguised a local May-eve procession of the Goddess Goda, during which all pious Christians were at first required to keep indoors, with an edifying anecdote about their benefactress Lady Godiva, modelling the story on Saxo's. The fraud is given away by the 'Lady Godiva' procession of Southam (twelve miles south of Coventry and included in Leofric's earldom), where two figures were carried, one white and one black—the Goddess as Holda and Hel, Love and Death. The story of Peeping Tom the Tailor is not mentioned by Roger of Wendover, but may be a genuine early tradition. The St.

Briavel's ceremony which took place, like the Southam and Coventry processions, on Corpus Christi, a date associated both at York and Coventry with mystery plays, is said to have commemorated the freeing of the people from a tax on the gathering of fire-wood in the neighbouring forest".

I expect historians in Coventry have done their own research but I like the traditional story better. And what of that strange ostracism, to be 'sent to Coventry'? John Kahn in *The Cat's Out of The Bag* says: "This strange way of referring to social shunning has two possible sources, both of which are connected with soldiers. According to one theory, the town of Coventry was a stronghold of Cromwell's supporters during the English Civil War, and royalist soldiers who were captured in the Midlands were therefore sent to Coventry for imprisonment. To be *sent to Coventry*, then, was to be withdrawn very effectively from circulation.

The other theory suggests that the people of Coventry were traditionally very unfriendly towards all soldiers. Women were reproached if they so much as talked to a soldier. Any soldier unfortunate enough to be posted to a garrison in or near Coventry could expect nothing but hostility from the townspeople. Being *sent to Coventry* was to be sentenced to a lonely life, away from the usual support of a friendly social circle."

## And Cis for CURITIBA

"Several cities show what can be done with a combination of imaginative municipal leadership and access to knowledge of what can be accomplished. Curitiba in south-eastern Brazil, for example, had massive problems of unemployment, slums, pollution and congestion. Twinning Curitiba with Hangzhou, one of the most beautiful cities in China, the Curitiba administration overcame their environmental problems by a mixture of means. Investment in a clean public transport system slashed air pollution, and the system is now used by 1.3 million people daily. A programme of waste separation and recycling grew until two-thirds of the city's daily waste was being processed. Then, a soft engineering approach to flooding and recreational space led to the creation of 2,100 hectares of porous parks, woods, gardens and other open spaces, mostly along river banks and in valley bottoms, where they act as water flow regulators during the rainy season. Curitiba, and its population of 1.6 million, was awarded the United Nations' highest environmental prize in 1990 by the UN Environment Programme."

Julian Caldecott in *Water: Life in Every Drop*.

When I read *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* about Charleston I was intrigued. When I read about Curitiba I was inspired. Perhaps Charleston should twin itself with Curitiba. Perhaps Hobart should. Perhaps dozens of disgusting dirty polluted cities should ...

## And also for

### COOPER'S CREEK

Francis Ratcliffe also traveled in the remote inland and has this to say: "We arrived at the main channel of Cooper's Creek in a weird three-quarters light, with the western sky shining a luminous green. As we dropped down from the stony slopes to the flat bed of silt, a chill fear took hold of me. The dry bed of that dead river, which rose in the plains of inland Queensland, and vanished in the salt-pans of Lake Eyre without knowing the sea, was the most eerie and haunted (of) spots I have ever visited. Moreover, it was haunted by no friendly and comprehensible ghosts, but by the spirits of broken tribes which died misunderstood."

It was also the grave of explorers Burke and Wills. ...

Sarah Murgatroyd in *The Dig Tree* wrote, “A chain of waterholes lined with coolibah trees seemed to appear from nowhere. The pools were linked by a series of channels to form a delicate ephemeral river system. This precious water was known to the Aborigines as Kini-papa. On 9 November 1845, Sturt named it ‘Cooper’s Creek’ after a South Australian judge.”

The Burke and Wills expedition from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1860-61 was a series of blunders, mistakes, foolish decisions and unnecessary deaths. Their first major discovery ... “After an excess of space and light, the rich green environment that suddenly confronted the party was a revelation. Ahead was Cooper Creek, winding its way through the wilderness like a fat orange snake. The tired and dusty convoy of men, horses and camels plunged down its banks, and threw themselves into the water. The sludgy reddish liquid was cool, refreshing and too good to resist. The men were exultant; they were almost halfway across the continent and in terms of European exploration they were nearing the edge of the map.

“Burke and Wills had reached one of the world’s most remote and elusive river systems. Modern topographical maps show the Cooper as an enticing maze of blue lines, which thread their way through the dunes to a series of lakes strung out across the desert. But the maps are deceptive. Most of the time the Cooper is a series of transient waterholes fed by a network of sluggish, muddy streams bleeding away in the relentless heat.

“Defying convention, the water flows away from the coast. Fed by tropical downpours sweeping over the Great Dividing Range, it creeps inland through thousands of small arterial channels. Sometimes the creeks braid together to form a billabong, before splintering once more to drizzle away and vanish into the earth. All around, the terrain is scarred with channels gouged out by floods that have since evaporated. Every year the baffling labyrinth changes according to the rainfall patterns, frustrating map-makers and confounding travellers.”

The explorers found a place brimming with life. Kangaroos, wallabies, dingoes, water rats, possums, bilbies, echidnas, turtles, fish including perch and yellowbelly, frogs, goannas, snakes, and clouds of cockatoos, pelicans, lorikeets, rosellas and more; not least the rampant insect life.

And the tribes of the area, the Ngurawola, Wangkamurra, Yawarrawarrka and Yandruwandha, were amazed and perplexed by this invasion of creatures they had never seen before, both people and camels. “The arrival of the explorers must have been an astonishing experience for the Yandruwandha, as if aliens had appeared from over the horizon. Their land was suddenly being invaded by strange figures mounted on giant four-legged creatures that snorted and spat their way through the sandhills.”

Burke split his party there and he, Wills, Gray and King made their dash to the Gulf returning, minus Gray, to the creek four months later, only to find that William Brahe and his party had left the Cooper only hours before their arrival. Burke and Wills, after making more unfortunate decisions, died on the creek, leaving King as the sole survivor to do what the others had failed to do: try to develop courteous and helpful relationships with the local tribes while he waited for rescue. In terms of adding new knowledge the expedition had done little. But it did have the result of promoting the area as possible cattle country; something which ended up dispersing and decimating the tribes.

“The Dig Tree stands on the Napa Merrie cattle station, just inside the Queensland border. The old coolibah has survived droughts, floods and termite infestations for an estimated 350 years. Since William Brahe carved his famous inscription, it has been the subject of much speculation and argument.” One blaze on the tree says B for Burke and LXV (65) under it. Then there is a blaze with William Brahe’s date of arrival ‘DEC 6-60’ and the day he left ‘APR 21-61’. And then on the opposite side is the DIG message, for the supplies and messages he buried in case Burke and his party had survived against the odds to return there.

“Today, the same hot wind still rustles through the branches of the old coolibah at Depot Camp 65 on the banks of Cooper Creek. Floods have washed away the remains of the stockade but some engravings on the tree are still just visible locked away inside deep round scars on the trunk. The creek still murmurs as it sweeps past the cracked red earth, and the air is filled with the chattering of the parrots and the raucous shrieks of the cockatoos. The Cooper was never a silent place.”

And now they have found a fossilized giant dinosaur there which they have named Cooper. I do not suppose he lived his life in silence ...

## D. Dis for ... excuse me while I take out my pin and go to my atlas

...

There are of course cities starting with D. Dublin, Dar-es-Salaam, Durban, Dundee but strangely enough D isn't terribly popular. I ran my finger up various coastlines without even finding a D. So here are two Ds which I liked for their sound.

DIRRANBANDI. I remember it from my schooldays and those immortal lines in 'On the Queensland Railways':

Iron rations come in handy  
On the way to Dirranbandi.

It makes me think of some small furry native creature, probably related to bandicoots. Of course Dirranbandi is just a country town in south-west Queensland, not so different from other country towns, so I wondered how it got its lovely name. Apparently a surveyor Claudius Buchanan Whish way back in 1885 chose a Yuwaaliyaay expression which might have meant 'broken forest country' or 'chorus of frogs at night'; the latter might be nicely appropriate during or just after rain. But it has also been suggested it comes from dhurrunbandaay having a connection to dhurrungal a type of caterpillar and baanda-y to do with walking or dhirrinbaa meaning to camp up above floodwaters. I suspect there is always doubt when Europeans tried to adapt Aboriginal words. Even the spelling (and no doubt the pronunciation) of Yuwaaliyaay varies. The town does have an Aboriginal hero athlete in Tom Dancey who won the Stawell Gift in Victoria in 1910 but I don't know if he spoke any Aboriginal languages or was ever asked for his interpretation of any words.

Sadly the rail service to Dirranbandi ceased in 2010. So you will need to carry your iron rations on the bus.

DROITWICH: There are a number of 'wich' names in England such as Nantwich. So what was a wich? Droitwich lies between Birmingham and Worcester in England and there seemed to be similar confusions over how it got its name. The Romans called it Salinae because of the warm salt springs there. I found it suggested that wyche came from hwicca an Anglo-Saxon word for a kingdom and droit, the French for right. But this didn't add up. Nantwich was described as coming from nant, the Welsh for brook and wich or wych meaning a brine spring, but Harwich, here-wic, was described as coming from the Old English for a military settlement. Collins said wich meant a salt works or salt producing town but wic meant a village. This came in various forms: wich, wiche, wichium, wych, and more. And it was not originally droit, being called at different times Drightwich, Drutwich, Dertwich, before settling on Droitwich in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; dright possibly coming from drit, the Old English for dirt or dryht to do with troops. The town then added Spa to its name because of the popularity of hot salt baths for various ailments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The town sounds rather attractive but it is slowly being engulfed by Birmingham to become virtually a dormitory suburb.

## Eis for El Dorado.

In 1982 we visited El Museo del Oro in Bogotá in Colombia. The other day I came upon a catalogue of some of its treasures when they toured Australia in 1978. The Collection was gradually put together by the Banco de la Republica there and its director Luis Duque Gómez said of it: “At the time of the Spanish conquest, no interest was shown in the gold artifacts of the Indians as objects of artistic or ethnographic value. For centuries they were rifled from tombs, and melted down in the numerous refineries set up for this purpose (at Santa Fe de Bogotá, Cartagena and Popayán, at Lima in Peru. Quito in Ecuador, and elsewhere).

“In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the re-settlement of the Quimbaya and Calima areas, a period of intensive *guaqueria* (grave-robbing) began. This practice continues and at present there are some 15,000 grave-robbers, *quaqueros*, operating at sites of archaeological significance. In the last fifteen years most of this activity has been concentrated in the Tairona, Sinú and Nariño areas.

“The Banco de la Republica has controlled the national and international Colombian gold trade since its foundation in 1923, when gold-buying agencies were established near the main gold deposits throughout the country.

“Pieces of Indian goldwork were acquired at random by these agencies, and most were melted down. Some were of considerable size, and a few were sent to Bogotá to be housed in the board-room of the Banco de la Republica. In 1939 the Bank decided to purchase goldwork with the idea of forming a collection. In addition, several important collections which had been formed from the results of grave-robbing were acquired.

“The first room for showing the collection to the public was opened in 1946, when a space was organized in the Banco de la Republica in Bogotá. After the Bank’s offices were moved to the present building, the gold collection was exhibited in a basement room set up for the purpose.

“In 1968 the Museo del Oro was established in a new building planned and built specifically to house and display the collection, which at that time comprised some 10,000 gold pieces and several hundred ceramic objects.” The museum had 26,000 pieces by 1978 and a great many more now. But it doesn’t take away the regret of what was so casually destroyed. “After pillaging treasures from the principal chiefs and from Indian tombs, the Spaniards searched for permanent sources of gold. They began to work the goldmines, many of which had been worked from early times by the indigenous peoples. At first they employed Indian workers and later, black slaves brought from Africa.

“The Spaniards afterwards set up foundries in the principal cities of the New World, where Indian goldware and raw gold were cast into ingots to be shipped to Spain. These operations lasted throughout the four centuries of Spanish domination in the Americas.” Within one century an estimated 181 tons of gold and 16,000 tons of silver had been shipped. The Spaniards saw no reason to prevaricate or express moral doubts about this wholesale pillage.

It is remarkable that anything was left. But the exhibition included exquisite everyday objects, from fishhooks to pins and needles, as well as objects of personal adornment such as pendants and ear rings, votive objects, and masks and other objects made for the dead. They were the objects of a sophisticated gold ‘culture’ skilled in mining and panning, forging, beating, moulding, casting, as well as people with an artistic view which created stylized people, animals and geometric designs.

And what of El Dorado as an idea?

Joan de Castellanos wrote back in 1589 of a ceremony carried out at Lake Guatavita:

He said that a certain King, naked,  
Went on rafts on a pool,  
To make offerings as he saw it,  
Coated totally with resin,  
And over that a quantity of gold dust

Like a ray of luminous sunshine

There to make his offerings  
Of gold jewels and fine emeralds  
And other ornamental pieces

The warriors, happy and pleased,  
Then called him 'El Dorado'.

El Dorado meant 'the Gilded One' but gradually it came to mean something like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, something eternally luring men on.

Gold just sits there, little lumps and flakes and veins in rocks, totally uninteresting you would think, but it has caused untold misery. Albert Nolan in *God in South Africa* writes, "What made all the difference in South Africa was the discovery of gold in 1886. Gold was also found in California and Australia, but what was discovered in South Africa was 'an endless treasure of gold' ... and, what is even more significant for our enquiry, the gold was found in thin layers very deep underground. One hardly needs to emphasise how important gold is for the economy of the whole world. South Africa soon became and still is the largest supplier of gold in the world and there is enough gold here to carry on mining for hundreds of years to come. But it is low-grade ore and requires deep-level mining. Because of the very thin layers of gold, one ton of ore produces far less gold than in other places and most of these layers are about a kilometre underground. Consequently enormous profits could be made but only with vast numbers of cheap, really cheap, workers!

"It was the initial need for cheap labour, for an exceptionally numerous labour force at an exceptionally cheap price, that made South Africa different. Without this need most of the indigenous people might have been eliminated like the native Americans or pushed into separate colonies outside of the 'golden areas'. What actually happened was that millions of black people were forced into a kind of 'slave' labour to dig the deepest holes and the largest network of tunnels on this planet. Pharaoh's little effort at putting up large buildings and pyramids with forced labour was as nothing in comparison with this.

"The system of internal colonialism is at its roots a system of forced labour. The system did not originate from the racism of the Boers or Afrikaner nationalism. It was developed by the white mine-owners and successive white governments for the purpose of profit-making. Racial differences were very conveniently exploited and when the National Party came to power in 1948 it simply perfected, streamlined and institutionalised the system and gave it the name 'apartheid'. Gold and racism was the winning combination. It turned South Africa into a capitalist's paradise."

When the Americans moved in to mine the El Dorado of gold and copper at Freeport in West Papua the local people were very sensibly using cowrie shells for their currency (though this doesn't make right the theft of their gold and copper) and different cowries had different values. When outsiders brought in cowries it could flood the market. Cowries like coins needed to be stabilized. Jean de Bruijn in Lloyd Rhys's *Jungle Pimpernel* tackled this problem. "A stabilized value was now set for the old and discoloured cowrie shells which had been in circulation before de Bruijn's arrival, and at the "peace table" new prices were fixed. As a concession, a dowry, which formerly had consisted of forty discoloured shells, was now established at forty new white shells and forty old ones. The missionaries were no longer permitted to import their own cowries, and supplies were only obtainable by a free monthly issue, made through the District Officer. Later, this restriction laid upon the missionaries was lifted, but prices remained pegged.

"During de Bruijn's term as District Officer administrative history was made in many ways. This fixing of prices was one instance; it was unique in the history of the Netherlands East Indies, because the Wissel Lakes is the only district in the whole of the Netherlands Empire where "real"

money is not in circulation; there are no N.E.I. guilders; the cowrie shell (*cypreamoneta*) is the only form of currency. Nevertheless, the Papuan of the central mountains has what to him is “real” and “false” money. The latter, the *pekoe mèrè* as the Ekaris call it, would not be accepted in payment of dowry, pigs or sweet potatoes, etc. They are worth very little, and are used mostly as ornaments or perhaps at the time of a *kede joewo* (mouse feast) to buy mice. In all the Ekari people have thirty-two sorts of cowries—*kawané*, *bombojè*, *koebawiarakidi*, *beke* are but a few of the names given to different varieties.

“The usefulness of the price-fixing regulation was very soon felt, because a few weeks later, when a Netherlands Geographical Society’s expedition arrived at Enarotali, all kinds of articles were purchased as ethnographical specimens—bows, arrows, stone knives and axes, carrying bags, etc., and they were paid for on the basis fixed.

“Cowries were divided into three grades: first quality—the large white ones: second quality—medium-sized yellow ones; and third quality—a grey one. Values were established on the basis of one four-gallon tin of sweet potatoes equals one cowrie shell of third quality; five arrows equals one cowrie of second quality; a bow equals three cowries of first quality, and so on. The experiences of previous expeditions in New Guinea had shown how the value of the cowrie could be depreciated to approximately one-tenth of its worth, and the stabilization made by de Bruijn saved the Wissel Lakes district from suffering a similar misfortune.” (But this simple sensible system was a casualty of the Indonesian takeover and perhaps it could never have survived the power of modern monetary beliefs.)

Now I happen to believe that cowrie shells are far more beautiful than a lump of gold. That a little lump of gristle can make something so beautiful, so shining, so wonderfully shaped, so fascinatingly marked is to me a miracle. I can look at cowrie shells in awe every day whereas a lump of gold just sits there like, well, like a lump. The only trouble is—you can’t turn cowrie shells into the beautifully wrought artifacts which amaze visitors to Bogotá’s Museo del Oro.

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“Every Spaniard who sailed to America expected to find an El Dorado. Fortune, too, did upon this what she has done upon very few other occasions. She realized in some measure the extravagant hopes of her votaries; and in the discovery and conquest of Mexico and Peru (of which the one happened about thirty, and the other about forty, years after the first expedition of Columbus), she presented them with something not very unlike that profusion of the precious metals which they sought for.”

Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. The strange thing is that this massive pillage of the gold and silver of the Americas did not make Spain, and certainly not ordinary Spaniards, rich.

## And the EUMERELLA SHORE

“The Eumerella Shore’ “is a well-known folk-song about the ‘duffing’ of cattle; there are a number of variant texts and titles including ‘The Eumarella Shore’, ‘The Numerella Shore’ and ‘The Neumerella Shore’. The references to free selection and Sir John Robertson make it clear that the ‘Eumerella’, district referred to is that in the NSW Monaro region, where there is a river known as the Numerella, and not the Eumerella River in south-eastern Victoria. It is less certain whether the song is the sarcastic lament of a squatter who feels his cattle will be stolen as a result of the Robertson Lands Acts or the boasts of a selector at the increased opportunities for ‘duffing’ as a result of the same Acts. ‘Cockatoo Jack’ is sometimes given as the author of the song, which was in print in the early 1860s.”

William Wilde in *Australian Poets & Their Works*.

But it is not the Eumerella Shore as a place I delight in but rather as a sound. It gives me a lovely feeling. And it conjures up a picture of small waves lapping a wild unpeopled shore while above purple clouds rimmed with gold grant the water below serenely beautiful drifting reflections.

## F. F is for FALKLANDS

“As to the wealth which the Colonies have drawn from the sea by their fisheries, you had all that matter fully opened at your bar. You surely thought those acquisitions of value, for they seemed even to excite your envy; and yet the spirit by which that enterprising employment has been exercised, ought rather, in my opinion, to have raised your esteem and admiration. And pray, Sir, what in the world is equal to it? Pass by the other parts, and look at the manner in which the people of New England have of late carried on the Whale Fishery. Whilst we follow them among the tumbling mountains of ice, and behold them penetrating into the deepest frozen recesses of Hudson’s Bay and Davis’s Streights, whilst we are looking for them beneath the Arctic Circle, we hear that they have pierced into the opposite region of polar cold, that they are at the antipodes, and engaged under the frozen Serpent of the south. Falkland Island, which seemed too remote and romantic an object for the grasp of national ambition, is but a stage and resting-place in the progress of their victorious industry. Nor is the equinoctial heat more discouraging to them, than the accumulated winter of both poles.”

Edmund Burke in his ‘Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq., on Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies’ March 22, 1775.

Ian Strange in *The Falkland Islands and their natural history* says, “In the latter half of the 1700s and early 1800s American whaling and sealing expeditions used the Falkland Islands as a shore-base for their operations about the islands and as a staging post for voyages farther south and round Cape Horn into the Pacific. The exact date when the Falklands were first visited by these whaling expeditions is not clear, for these exploiters were often secretive about their hunting grounds, but writings about the whalers from Nantucket dated 1771 indicate that the Falklands had been visited by these men before this time. There is also a record of an expedition of several vessels having made a voyage in 1775.

“One of the earlier documented voyages to the Falklands was by a ship called the *States*. Owned by William Rotch, a Quaker whale oil merchant from Nantucket, the *States*, under Capt Benjamin Hussey, sailed for the islands in late 1784, by which time it was no secret that seals were numerous about the archipelago. With the *States* was the whaleship *Mary*, under Capt Shubael Coffin. In the history of the New England whalers, Nantucket Island, its little colony of mainly Quaker whalers and the names of Rotch and Coffin are famous. The same names were to become linked with the Falklands and today remain as an intriguing reminder of the islands’ past history and its close connection with the whalers from the north-eastern seaboard of the USA over two hundred years ago. It is not clear where the first expeditions of whalers to the Falklands made landfall but there is little doubt that the small archipelago in the south-west corner of the Falkland group was very quickly to become their self-styled home.

“New Island, with its excellent harbours, may have been the first such home, being named perhaps as early as 1775 after New England’s seaports such as New London, New York, New Haven and New Bedford. It may even have been a member of the Coffin family who first sailed into and named New Island, for the island once had a Coffin Harbour and has today, protecting its entrance, Coffin Island.” (Ian Strange lived on New Island.)

“Beaver Island was almost certainly named after one of two famous whaleships called *Beaver*; either the vessel which featured in the 1773 Boston tea party incident, or a later vessel which bears the distinction of having been the first American whaleship to double Cape Horn in

1791. Between Beaver Island and Weddell Island, known by the early whalers as Swan Island, lie some twenty smaller islands, many of them bearing names linked to the Quakers of Nantucket and their whalers: Penn Island, Barclay Island, both Rotch vessels named after whalers; Governor Island, Little Coffin Island, Quaker Island and Quaker Harbour. Others are Pitt Island and States Harbour, the latter doubtless named after the vessel *States* and her voyage of 1784.” (There are other Quaker names such as Fox Island.)

“Sadly many of these islands also bear the scars of these past exploiters. Not only did the islands offer excellent shelter for their ships, from where they could launch whaling and sealing operations, but smaller accessible islands with their cover of tussock grass were ideal sites for holding fresh meat supplies in the form of pigs, goats and rabbits.”

These animals did a great deal of damage to small islands denuding them of their original thick cover of tussock grass. But in 1831 a different conflict descended on the Islands. A man called Louis Vernet arrived from Buenos Aires in 1826 with a party of settlers and took over the abandoned settlement at Port Louis, renamed Port Soledad. In 1828 the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata made him governor. Britain sent a letter of protest. But then ... “Depredations by whalers and sealers of other nations had increased to such an extent that, on his appointment as governor on behalf of the Argentine government, Vernet issued a warning to masters of sealing and whaling vessels that unless they ceased operations they would be arrested. Few if any heeded the warning. In July 1831 Vernet seized the American sealer *Harriet* and took the vessel to Buenos Aires, where her master, Davison, was to stand trial. Davison escaped from custody in Buenos Aires and joined the American corvette *Lexington* which immediately set sail for Port Soledad, bent on retaliation for the loss of the *Harriet*. On 28 December 1831 the *Lexington* arrived at Soledad and on orders from her commander, Syllas Duncan, a force of men went ashore and sacked the settlement. The destruction of years of work by Duncan’s action was a severe blow to Vernet but events that followed were to prevent him from ever returning and resurrecting his venture.” He went home to Buenos Aires and ... “In September 1832 a temporary Argentine governor took over Port Soledad but his office came to an abrupt end shortly afterwards when he was attacked and killed by a group of mutineers from one of his vessels.”

Of course this was no comfort to the whales or the seals. Regardless of who claimed the islands the whales continued to be harpooned. Whaling and sealing in the South Atlantic did not end till the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“Twenty-five years ago it was possible to stand on certain coastal vantage points and watch migrating whales pass the islands. Many islanders still retain memories of calm evenings and the sound of blowing whales as they made their way through narrow passages between the islands, either on their way south to feeding grounds or northwards to summer breeding areas. Parts of the islands still bear witness to the days when whales were common; on maps are names such as Whale Passage, Whale Bay, Whale Point and Harpoon Island. Evidence in the form of bleached whalebone litters some coasts but sadly the larger baleen whales themselves are now a rare sight. Occasionally the rarer forms of whale, beaked and toothed whales, are found stranded. In most years groups of blackfish or pilot whales are sighted about the Falklands” but now they face a different threat: massive fishing for the whales’ staple food, krill, may end up destroying the whales’ future even more surely than old time whalers and harpooners ...

## Gis for GIBRALTAR.

Len Deighton in *Horse under Water* has his characters say some uncomplimentary things about Gibraltar. But then Gibraltar is a military base and military bases tend to be places of punch-ups and heavy drinking. So I turned to Eric Whelpton’s *Southern Spain* for a broader view.

He writes, "Our thoughts turned inevitably to its long history which goes back to the remote ages, for as the Gateway to the Mediterranean it appeared to be the goal of all the maritime nations such as the Phoenicians, the Etruscans, the Carthaginians and the Greeks.

Clearly Gibraltar must have been known even before that time, possibly to the Egyptians whose ships certainly reached the Aeolian Islands and may easily have gone much further.

In Greek legends, Hercules is said to have accomplished one of his labours when he released Atlas from his burden of supporting the world on his shoulders so that the giant should fetch for him the golden apples of the Hesperides whose whereabouts were too remote for the hero to find. On each side of the Straits, Hercules erected his two pillars to guard the entrance to the inland sea, and one of these, the Rock, was set up by him at Gibraltar. The legend also relates that the monster Geryones, with three bodies, lived on the fabulous Island of Erythia, which was so called because it lay in the west under the rays of the setting sun. This legend may well explain why the cult of Hercules was practiced at Cadiz, where the ruins of a temple in his honour have been discovered. Being annoyed by the heat of the sun, Hercules shot at Helios (the sun), who so much admired his boldness that he presented him with a golden cup or boat in which he came to Erythia. It was there that he slew Geryones and sailed with his booty to Tartessus, a city which was at the mouth of the Guadalquivir and was known to the Romans.

Under the Greeks and Romans, Gibraltar was clearly a port of call for the ships in search of the gold and silver of the Spanish mines, though it is probable that they preferred the greater safety afforded to them by the harbour of Cadiz. Certainly Gibraltar was the last place held by the Carthaginians on the peninsula, though they were forced to abandon it in the year 206 B.C."

The Moslems from North Africa reached Spain in 710 AD under their commander, Tarik, who gave his name both to the town of Tarifa and to Gibraltar. Geb Tarik. The Hill of Tarik. Crusaders from Norway were said to have captured Gibraltar briefly around 1100. Christian inroads gradually drove the Moslems back to Grenada and Gibraltar and Gibraltar became again a part of Spain in 1462. "For a while the Rock was part of the estate of the Guzmans, the Dukes of Medina Sidonia, ancestors of the Commander of the Spanish Armada, but it was taken over by Queen Isabella in 1501. Thirty-five years later its fortifications were strengthened and rebuilt by the order of the ubiquitous Emperor Charles V whose arms can still be seen on the gateway of the town's ramparts."

It was Cromwell who had the idea of annexing Gibraltar so as to protect English ships from the Spanish and the Dutch as trade with the Levant grew. But it was Admiral Rook who captured Gibraltar for Britain in 1704. "The invaders did not behave too well. Some churches were demolished and the inhabitants of the city were treated with such brutality that they were driven to take refuge in the hills nearby where they built the town of San Roque."

And there the British have been ever since. And so have the monkeys. "The famous monkeys proved to be an amusing surprise. They wander about a lane two-thirds of the way up the side of the Rock and are very friendly, even over friendly. They clambered about all over the car and would have joined us inside if our driver had not snapped up the window, for he told us that they can be vicious when frightened. Their favourite trick is to play with the windscreen wipers which seem to fascinate them. These creatures draw rations and they are so much part of the British Army that a private and an officer are responsible for their care. So far none of these apes have reached commissioned rank, but there is still time!"

"I spent the whole morning exploring Gibraltar, which I found to be a huddle of small shops, restaurants and hotels all along one main street, the adjoining small alleys leading to the harbour being of little import. I bought some underclothes and a Spanish newspaper and sat in a café. After lunch in a restaurant, I spent most of the afternoon watching some people play tennis who seemed to be naval officers and their wives. The truth is that there wasn't much to see in Gibraltar; it is not

endowed with many tourist attractions and most people only go there to buy things because they are cheap and duty free.”

(A WW2 account quoted in *The Secret Agent's Bedside Reader* edited by Michael Smith.)

Every so often Spain demands Gibraltar back but their demands are surprisingly half-hearted – possibly because Britain employs a number of Spaniards on the base and depends on Spanish produce brought in daily. As just another decrepit Spanish naval base it might do far less for Spain.

## G And Gis for GOA

Years ago people seemed to take pleasure in saying that Goa had been denied the right of self-determination because the Indian army had invaded and chased the Portuguese out and everyone was now happy and so why should the Timorese want an act of self-determination? Hadn't the Indonesians done exactly what the Indians had done and got away with?

I found this thinking not only woolly but hypocritical. Every colonized people, including Aboriginal Australians, should have the right to self-determination. For any country or government or the U.N. to deny that or fudge or undermine that right undermines us all.

Even if the majority of Goans did want to join India that didn't remove their right to a properly organized and carried out U.N. vote on their future.

So what did the people of Goa think? I have met people who visited there and were pleased that the Goans have managed to retain something of their distinctive identity and culture. But the other day I came upon a 1964 article by Graham Greene.

He wrote, “Outside Goa one is aware all the time of the interminable repetition of the ramshackle, the enormous pressure of poverty, flowing, branching, extending like flood-water. This is not a question of religion: the Goan Hindu can be distinguished as easily from the Hindu village of India as the Christian, and there is little need to drive the point home at the boundary with placards. The houses in the Goan village were built with piety to last.

“There are few extremes of poverty and affluence: most houses, however small, are constructed of laterite blocks with brown tiles of great beauty. They were built by Goans not by Portuguese (for the Portuguese lived only in the towns), often by Goans in exile, in Aden or in Africa, who hoped to return one day, for the far-ranging Goan has a loyalty to his village you seldom find elsewhere. It seemed the first thing one Goan asked another – not in what city he worked but from what village he came, and in distant Bombay every Goan village has its club of exiles – 350 clubs.

“In the first Indian village outside Goa on the road to Bombay you are back to the mud huts and broken thatch which are almost a sign of affluence compared with the horrible little cabins made out of palm fronds and bits of canvas and any piece of old metal on the outskirts of Bombay. These are dwellings to escape from; how can their inhabitants feel loyalty to Maharashtra – the huge amorphous member-State of the Indian Union neighbouring Goa, into which Goa must almost certainly be sooner or later submerged?

“No wonder that in villages like Anjuna you find sad old men sitting in almost empty rooms on carved Goan chairs regretting the past – the green and red wines of Portugal, the Scotch whisky at thirteen rupees a bottle which will cost now, if you are lucky to find a bottle, fifty or sixty.” This is because there was Prohibition in Maharashtra.

“The last Portuguese Governor has left friendly memories (he is said to be in disgrace for having disobeyed Salazar's orders to destroy Panjim - it would have been no great architectural loss perhaps ... ) ... Nor do you hear anywhere a word against the Portuguese as individuals.”

Greene goes on to say that in local elections the party proposing merger won by a small margin with “nearly all Catholics” voting for “a separate state” and “nearly all Hindus for a merger”. But “watching the face of my Hindu driver, as he saw for the first time ragged out-of-heels

Poona and then the squalid outskirts of Bombay, I wondered whether his opinions were changing already after leaving the tidy streets and the great clean river at Panjim.”

The Congress Party presented itself as the party promoting ‘merger’ and the hope that the Goans would want to be ruled from Bombay. But this does not meet the requirements of the 1960 U.N. Declaration on the Granting of Independence for Colonial Countries and Peoples, for people to be provided with education into their options and the right to vote freely using adult suffrage.

Greene ends his article ‘Goa the Unique’ with, “Portugal helped to form the special character of Goa and Goa’s character may survive Portugal for a year or two. But you cannot hang a skull at the entrance of Goa as you can on a mango tree to avert the envious eye. No wonder that even in the great houses of Jesuit Goa you have a sense of impermanence. Dust lies on the furniture, in the best bedroom suitcases are piled on the floor with an overnight bag on top. It is as though the family has not had time to unpack properly, and yet already it is nearly the hour to leave.”

So could Goa have become a small independent state? Like Monaco? Like Luxembourg? I don’t see why not. After all, India is a British creation. They swept dozens of small independent states into one large entity called India. So why could not Goa have survived as a Portuguese creation, now in its own small unique state?

## And for GOODENOUGH

“Then I flew in a C-47 to Goodenough Island at the top of the Coral Sea, to which I Corps headquarters and the 24<sup>th</sup> Division would be moved in the fairly immediate future.

“After a three-hour stay on Goodenough we took off again for the return trip to Milne Bay. Just at the take-off the clouds lifted and I could look back on the eight-thousand-foot green mountain range on the island. At the moment—and I’m not quite sure I would change my judgment now—Goodenough seemed to me the most beautiful place I had ever seen.”

General Robert Eichelberger writing about his WW2 experiences in New Guinea in *Our Jungle Road to Tokyo*.

This would have made little impression on me except for the fact that my father was in the 8<sup>th</sup> Squadron RAAF in that war and they were based for a time on Goodenough Island. Though if he shared Eichelberger’s views I do not remember him ever saying so.

At first I thought the island was seen as good enough for some purpose but no, it was named for someone called Goodenough. Alan Villiers in *The Coral Sea* mentions: “Almost three hundred years after Mendaña’s men had foully murdered Malope, natives of Santa Cruz killed a British naval officer with poisoned arrows at Graciosa Bay. This was Commodore Goodenough, Royal Navy, then in H.M.S. *Pearl* and commodore of the Australian station.” And: “(Bully) Hayes was a wanted man for many things, though on the whole his relations with the natives were amicable. It was essential to remove his influence from the islands. Commodore Goodenough, Royal Navy (who was later murdered by poisoned arrows at Santa Cruz) was then in command of the Australian station which included all the western Pacific. He brought H.M.S. *Rosario* to Lele, in Kusaie, to look for Hayes. The first person he saw there was Hayes, who came out in a canoe to pilot the warship in. It was not Bully’s way to run from trouble.

“Commodore Goodenough had him arrested on the spot, and did his own pilotage. Once again arose the difficulty of proving crimes said to have been committed in the waters of islands which were administered by no man, and upon the high seas. A file on Hayes the Commodore had, in common with every other naval commander in the Pacific. But witnesses against him he had not. Moreover, as the Bully reminded him, he was still a citizen of the United States, come aboard a British warship of his own free will and benevolent grace, to offer his free services and local knowledge. There was no law by which Hayes could be held, and, reluctantly, the Commodore had to let him go.”

Tim Flannery in *Among the Islands* mentions the fatal shooting of “Commodore Goodenough, after whom Goodenough Island is named.” “ ‘Holy Joe’ as he was known to his colleagues had been on a mission to stamp out blackbirding. The death of this deeply religious and moral naval officer who had the welfare of the natives at heart left a lingering suspicion in the minds of European visitors for decades.” And the people of Santa Cruz had no way of knowing that he had not come to kidnap more of them for the Queensland canefields.

Flannery writes, “In contrast to Woodlark, Goodenough Island is close to the mainland and accessible by a regular air service. Indeed I had seen it once previously. A few years earlier, when flying along the mountainous spine of southeast New Guinea, cloud had obscured all but the three highest peaks at the eastern end of the range. I soon identified two as Mount Suckling and Mount Dayman—the highest points on the tail of New Guinea’s mountain backbone, if you imagine the island as a gigantic bird. But I struggled to identify the third peak. It was an abrupt rocky spire, lying to the north of the others. Only later did I realise that it was not part of the mainland at all, but the summit of Mount Goodenough.”

“Goodenough Island is the westernmost of the three islands that comprise the D’Entrecasteaux Group, and it must be one of the tallest islands for its size on the planet. All three (Fergusson, Normanby and Goodenough) are old fragments of continental crust that became detached from New Guinea some time between two and five million years ago, and although the strait separating the islands from the mainland is narrow, it is very deep, as are the waters separating the islands from each other.”

Flannery and his team went to Goodenough specifically to research the black gazelle-faced wallaby which he describes as “a graceful creature with large, expressive eyes, short ears and a rather long, elegant snout. Its fur is shiny black and rather coarse on the neck, but as soft as silk elsewhere. When you ruffle it, a pure white underfur is revealed to striking effect. Strangely, on some individuals one or both front paws are pure white.” But that wasn’t the only interesting creature they found. “Blue-breasted pittas abounded in the forest, their bright red-and-blue plumage surreal against the jungle green. And small snakes—which we eventually identified as a species of *Aspidomorphus*, a ‘venomous but not dangerous species’ according to the reptile guide—were daily visitors at the camp. One of the first sounds we heard upon arriving was a powerful, rolling, almost moan-like call that seemed to go on forever. Although not unpleasant, along with the wispy moss and great boulders the low, haunting sound lent a sombre air to the place.

“It was some days before I discovered where the sound came from. Looking into the gnarled branches I saw a sharp, blood-red eye peering down at me. It belonged to a curl-crested manucode, a relative of the birds of paradise, which is found only in the D’Entrecasteaux and nearby islands. Predominantly blue-black, it looks somewhat like a large, iridescent crow, but its red eye and head gear of crisply curled feathers immediately set it apart.”

And: “More common in the mountain forests was a reddish-grey tree-dwelling rodent known as Forbes’s tree-mouse. They are fluffy-furred creatures that spend their days sleeping in densely packed family groups in tree-hollows high in the canopy, and sally forth at night to eat fruit, buds and leaves. ... These rodents have an interesting family structure. We invariably found the nest-hollow to be occupied by a pair, which was sometimes accompanied by what looked to be two generations of young, the older of which was adult-sized. The tree-mice never attempted to bite, and it may be that these gentlest of rodents form lasting pair bonds and strong family ties, allowing offspring to remain with their parents into adulthood.”

The island was ravaged by drought when they flew in and the custom of burning the kunai grass had made things worse. However as they climbed “Soon after, we arrived at a campsite that was clearly used from time to time by the local people. Situated in beautiful, primary forest at around 1300 metres elevation, it was a perfect base for our investigations. ... Just outside our boulder camp flowed a frigid, crystal-clear stream. Both above and below the camp it cascaded over

yet more boulders to form a series of waterfalls and deep pools. I later learned that the local people called the camp and the river *Boitutudiadobodobona*. The Goodenough language, which seemed to be full of such lengthy and convoluted words, was one that I never even attempted to learn.”

So what impact did the War still have on Goodenough? “The airstrip is located on a parched, kunai-covered plain that lies in a rain-shadow on the northern side of the island. It was constructed during World War II and had served as a major base for allied bombers that were harassing the Japanese. Many damaged aircraft were abandoned there, and at the time I visited their remains were so abundant that several village houses had been built entirely of aircraft aluminium, some of it still bearing American insignias and other wartime markings. Another curious legacy of the war was that there were no traditional wooden spears to be seen. Instead metal spears, fashioned from war *remanié* and used for pig and wallaby hunting, were ubiquitous.”

## H His for HY-BRASAIL And Other Imaginary Countries.

“A vision of Hy Brazel forbodes national troubles.”

W. B. Yeats in *The Celtic Twilight*.

Gerald Griffin wrote ‘Hy-Brasail—The Isle of the Blest’:

On the ocean that hollows the rocks where ye dwell,  
A shadowy land has appeared, as they tell;  
Men thought it a region of sunshine and rest,  
And they called it *Hy-Brasail*, the isle of the blest.  
From year unto year on the ocean’s blue rim,  
The beautiful spectre showed lovely and dim;  
The golden clouds curtained the deep where it lay,  
And it looked like an Eden, away, far away!

A peasant who heard of the wonderful tale,  
In the breeze of the Orient loosened his sail;  
From Ara, the holy, he turned to the west,  
For though Ara was holy, *Hy-Brasail* was blest.  
He heard not the voices that called from the shore—  
He heard not the rising wind’s menacing roar;  
Home, kindred, and safety, he left on that day,  
And he sped to *Hy-Brasail*, away, far away!

Morn rose on the deep, and that shadowy isle,  
O’er the faint rim of distance, reflected its smile;  
Noon burned on the wave, and that shadowy shore  
Seemed lovelily distant, and faint as before;  
Lone evening came down on the wanderer’s track,  
And to Ara again he looked timidly back;  
Oh! far on the verge of the ocean it lay,  
Yet the isle of the blest was far, far away!

Rash dreamer, return! O, ye winds of the main,  
Bear him back to his own peaceful Ara again.  
Rash fool! For a vision of fanciful bliss,  
To barter thy calm life of labour and peace.



estuarine jewel but leaving the airport the roads are a tangle of jimmies and motor bikes, the air sharp with exhaust fumes and the ground level view of the lake makes the heart plummet. The jewel has been used as a sewer and great skeins of algal blooms sloop at the shore. Paradise has become septic in a handful of years and nobody denies the vandals' right to call it progress." And "You can be lulled by food and beer and friendly conversation until you look below the restaurant deck and see garbage and green slime slopping about the piles. People excrete, and wash clothes, bodies and dishes directly in the lake. This culture, despite its inarguable sophistication, is poisoning paradise."

Jayapura is an Indonesian city. Hollandia was a Dutch town. And any book of Australian place-names will provide you with dozens of places which began as one thing and now are called something else. And there is that other thing. If we *did* find Paradise, or indeed Hy-Brasil, would we immediately set about ravaging and despoiling it?

Donald Johnson wrote *Phantom Islands of the Atlantic: The Legends of Seven Lands That Never Were*. His seven islands were Buss Island, Frisland, Isle of Demons, Antillia, The Isle of Seven Cities, Hesperides and Hy-Brazil.

Now we go to maps (or perhaps Google Earth) and if something isn't there we can be confident that it doesn't exist. But this was not the case a thousand years ago. Johnson writes, "One eminent historian of the Middle Ages was the Irish monk Dicuil, whose works date from 814 to 825. Dicuil belonged to that era of migrant Irish monks – *Scotti peregrinantes* – who left their monasteries during the eighth and ninth centuries for the continent, where they founded new centers of learning. Dicuil went to the court of Charles the Great, popularly called Charlemagne, where he wrote his major treatise, *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae* (On Measuring the Earth), drawing his material from as many as thirty Greco-Roman sources. He also chronicled the voyages of various Irish monks who traveled to Iceland in search of solitude, as well as his own travels to the islands around Ireland and Britain. But Dicuil's was one of only a few European voices in the Middle Ages that kept the knowledge of the ancients and the memory of the Atlantic archipelagoes alive. Besides the domination of the Catholic Church, there was another reason why scientific information, such as the size of the earth, was virtually lost to Western Europe. All this material was written in Greek, and very few men in medieval times, even among the most learned, could read the language. It wasn't until the Byzantine scholar Emanuel Chrysolokas (1355-1415) translated Ptolemy's work into Latin that Ptolemy's importance and influence in the western world increased dramatically. From the time of its first printing in 1462, Ptolemy's *Geographia* was the standard authority for the next 150 years."

But it was not an authority on small mysterious landmasses which might or might not exist in the Atlantic ...

And then I came upon a book called *Lost Countries*. But this wasn't about mysterious islands which appear and disappear. Its subtitle was *Exotic Tales From an Old Stamp Album* and it is about countries which existed, and had their own stamps, but were invaded, merged, achieved independence, changed their names ... Have you, for instance, heard of Batum or Dedeagh or Inini or Obock or Tuva? In case you haven't, turn to I for Inini for one mysterious entity.

## I. I is for ICELAND and for IRELAND and for Isles of the Blest

Donald Johnson also has this to say about maps and voyagers, "One of the most unusual and controversial maps in the chronicles of cartography resulted from a voyage in 1380 by a Venetian nobleman, Nicolò Zeno."

"Although the text states that Engroneland (Greenland) was his destination, this is obviously an error on the part of Nicolò the Younger when he compiled the letters. Geographically, it makes sense that the next major land on his voyage would be Iceland. Nicolò says that, in the summertime,

“many barks from the Islands thereabout and from the Cape above Norway and from Trondon come here to exchange their goods for the fish and skins of various kinds of beasts.” By the middle of the thirteenth century, Norwegian vessels had well-established routes between Norway and the Shetlands, Faroes, and Iceland. At first, Trondheim was the center in Norway for the Icelandic trade, the principal sea route being from Trondheim to Eyjafjörd on the north coast of Iceland. Later Trondheim was superceded in importance by Bergen as the principal port of trade.

“Iceland instead of Greenland, is confirmed as the destination of Nicolò in other parts of the story: The volcanic mountains that throw forth fire “like *Vesuvius* and *Etna*”, the description of the monastery of friars and of how they heat their houses with the hot water from thermal springs; and the use of Latin as a common tongue—all are in keeping with Iceland.”

The puzzle is why Irish monks felt the need to take stormy passage in small boats to Iceland in search of ‘solitude’. Donnybrook Fair was undoubtedly noisy enough but there were many places in Ireland which would surely have offered sufficient solitude. After all, there were collections of monks on remote islands off the west coast of Ireland. I cannot help wondering if it was the close eye of their superiors in the Catholic Church they were escaping. In Iceland they had a degree of freedom to talk and discuss and debate without being deemed heretical if they asked awkward questions and pondered on awkward profundities.

## And for INN

If you were as puzzled by Inini as I was here is the answer: “Inini is part of French Guiana, a tropical country on the north-east of South America. It borders Brazil and Surinam. It is also part of the European Union, by dint of it being a region of France.”

The French claimed Inini in 1503 but their first colonization attempts failed, first by being driven out by the Portuguese, then by the Amerindian tribes, then the Dutch eyed it. “It ended up back in French control. However, its masters were not sure what to do with it, apart from import hot peppers from it, and in 1854 it became a penal colony. Its most notorious prison was Devil’s Island, off the coast, north of the capital”, Cayenne. “Devil’s Island was actually three islands, ironically known as the Isles de Salut (Salvation Islands). Someone had a dark sense of humour. Each island had its own jail. The main one was on Royale, where most ordinary convicts were made to work in timber camps.” The second island, St Joseph, was the punishment island where prisoners were kept in solitary confinement. And Devil’s Island was for political prisoners, the most famous being Alfred Dreyfus. There were few escapes, sharks, ants, hunger, fear of the jungles, kept most men there and “it is estimated that of the 60,000 people sent to Devil’s Island, only 2,000 ever returned.”

(A friend Carol Bacon visited on a cruise ship and wrote, “Long lives weren’t on the agenda at the Isle Royale in French Guinea. The French used this lush, pleasant spot as a prison, the staff living in elegant, spacious dwellings while the prisoners were chained up in poky cells when not at work. The hard cases were housed on nearby Devil’s Island, which was the setting for the book *Papillon*, although the chap who wrote it was in another French jail. The events in the book didn’t happen to him either, most of them happened to other people, well before his time.”)

The French planned to build roads and railways into the interior of Inini using captured prisoners from the wars in Indochina but this idea was gradually given up and in 1946 Inini became part of French Guiana. The three small countries there, Cayenne or French Guiana, Surinam which had been a Dutch colony, and Guyana formerly British Guiana, are the only non-Latino countries in South America. All are hot and humid ... but interesting ...

## And for INTERPOL

Of course you will say that Interpol is not a country and of course it isn't. "The International Criminal Police Commission, he explained, had been founded in 1923 in Vienna, with twenty member countries. Membership grew to thirty-four countries, but by 1942, when the Nazis took all the files away to Berlin, the organization had ceased to exist.

"If the Gestapo hoped to find a gold mine of political information, they were disappointed," he added. "All they found were files on common-law crimes—but that experience gave rise to the rules forbidding the organization to handle political crimes."

"In 1946, Sicot continued, the International Criminal Police Commission was set up again, here in Paris, and Interpol was registered then as the telegraphic address."

The Readers Digest's *Great Cases of Interpol*. Though there is not always a neat line between what is political and what isn't.

"Interpol Headquarters at St. Cloud is a modern six-story building of glass and stone, its roof a tangle of antennas. It is located five miles from Notre Dame, three from the Eiffel Tower, on a quiet suburban street where only an occasional commuter train passing on the tracks below disturbs the peaceful calm. Its symbol in bronze—a world globe with a sword and the scales of justice—is set against a sheet of green marble to the right of the entranceway. There are two small elevators inside, and visitors sign in at the guard desk in the spacious entrance area. Moving from the drug-traffic section to the international fraud and counterfeiting sections, to the areas dealing with other international crimes, one finds the Spartan plainness of working police stations all over the world—two metal desks to a cubicle, plastic chairs, calendar pictures.

"The heart of Interpol is the radio and telecommunications room on the top floor, which transmits to and receives from the forty giant antennas and the twenty-five transmitters spread over nearly a hundred acres of pasture at St. Martins' Abbat." ... "The walls are covered with maps, pins on them representing Interpol stations around the world. Interpol's languages are English, French, Spanish and Arabic."

Of course Interpol has grown since that was written in 1982 and the digital revolution has overtaken Morse code. But in the end fighting crime is the same mixture of networking, careful collection of data, cross-checking, and a dollop of luck that it has always been.

## J. J is for JEDDAH

I put this in, not because I plan to go there but because it amazed me. "Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, for example, was a historic city with a distinctive character that always impressed visitors. It consisted of a network of remarkable tall houses that made ingenious use of the local meteorological conditions: the uppermost floors were designed to catch the sea breeze, which created upward draughts with regular temperature differentials; the overarching, open, louvered windows filtered out the sun's glare but allowed air to circulate freely in the rooms; the surrounding flat terraces with wooden grilles permitted the movement of any cool air currents on the hottest of summer nights. These traditional houses showed what the power of imagination and craftsmanship in indigenous building could achieve. American influence and big business brought American city planning and architecture to Saudi Arabia; and soon Jeddah became a poor replica of Houston. Narrow streets and alleyways gave way to huge, wide, sun-baked roads and over-heated concrete monstrosities. Traditional architecture, age-old souks, Saudi cafés – all disappeared to be replaced by shopping malls, fast food restaurants, theme parks and hotels. Americanisation has meted out an even worse fate to Mecca, the holiest city of Islam, where there are no streets left for anyone to walk on. American planners, consultants and architects have turned Mecca – which is, of course, the focus for 1.3 billion Muslims of the planet who face towards the city during their five daily prayers – into a third-rate American city in which tunnels, flyovers, spaghetti junctions and multi-lane motorways compete for attention with gaudy hotels and the ubiquitous shopping malls. The hatred of America that many Saudis exhibit has little to do with the often-cited American military presence

in ‘holy areas’ – in fact, American troops were based hundreds of miles to the north of what are traditionally considered the holy areas, the cities of Mecca and Medina. The actual withdrawal of US troops, announced in 2003, has been gradual, and considerable numbers of US government and defence contractor personnel remain. The real problem stems more from the fact that the fabric of traditional Saudi life has been torn apart by Americanisation and replaced with centralized, mass-produced monotony. Saudi cities do not reflect the history, culture, tradition or values of the Arabian Peninsula – they sing solemn homilies to the American way of life.”

From *Will America Change?* by Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies. But it must be asked why the Saudis chose to Americanize their cities ... after all, with oil they had the whip hand ...

“Since returning from the United States, Sami was living in Jeddah, a city that had stood at the crossroads of trade and religion for centuries. In the seventh century, the third caliph after the prophet, Othman ibn Affan, declared the seaport to be the official gate to Mecca for all pilgrims arriving by sea. Others came overland in caravans through Damascus or Baghdad. Since then, Jeddah was flooded every year by thousands of Muslims from all corners of the world. Many would settle in the city, whose connection to the spiritual realm went even further. According to one interpretation of the Quran, after being exiled from paradise, Eve and Adam were reunited on Mount Arafat near Mecca. Legend had it that Eve, the mother of mankind, was later buried in Jeddah, the city whose name means “grandmother” in Arabic. There had even been a tomb in the city that was said to be Eve’s. For centuries, pilgrims would visit the site, especially barren women, with supplications to the divine. Famed travelers wrote about and sketched the tomb, which was approximately five hundred feet long with a carved square stone representing the navel. It had survived the passage of time and the weight of countless pleas, only to be destroyed during the 1926 conquest of the Hejaz by Abdelaziz ibn Saud, who was working to unify the provinces of the Arabian Peninsula under his rule. His son Faisal, the future king, had led the assault on Jeddah after the city had been besieged and starved for over a year. Barely nineteen, Faisal was named viceroy of the province, and he ordered the destruction of the tomb. An ancient cemetery in Medina dating back to the days of the prophet was also razed. The new rulers of Arabia saw the dangers of *shirk* (idolatry) everywhere. From sultan of Najd to king of Najd and the Hejaz and then king of the whole peninsula, Abdelaziz gave his name to the new kingdom and his new subjects.”

from *Black Wave* by Kim Ghattas

“There is no means of calculating the number of pious Muslims who have perished while making the grueling journey across the deserts of Saudi Arabia since the time of the Prophet Mohammed and the first pilgrimage, but the total of dead is estimated to be in the thousands. While I am pleased to report that it is no longer necessary for devout Muslims to do battle with raiding bedouin parties, or even to travel through Saudi Arabia on foot or on lean camels, in order to fulfil their fervent desire to perform one of the basic tenets of Islam, still, the annual pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah (Mecca) remains a chaotic affair. Each year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims converge on the cities, airports, and highways of Saudi Arabia for the rite of pilgrimage during the time of *Haj*. (*Haj* begins in Dhu al-Qida, the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the hegira calendar, and ends during Dhu al-Hijah, the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the hegira calendar.)”

*Daughters of Arabia* by Jean Sasson.

In 1990 over 1,500 pilgrims were crushed to death in a tunnel in Mecca but she says “it is true that a number of Hajjis are trampled or crushed to death every *Haj* season” which suggests that pilgrims need not only great devotion but great courage.

Now, pilgrims fly in from around the world as well as arriving by sea. And a main arrival point is the port of Jeddah on the Red Sea. So how do the pilgrims feel about the changes?

And of course the Saudis have their own reasons for changing things and those reasons have nothing to do with the USA.

“In Mecca, the Saudi religious and political authorities are trying to enshrine Muhammad in a different way, by taking him out of history so that he is no longer human at all. Religious police warn pilgrims off from praying at sites, such as the cave where the Prophet is said to have received the first message from God, on the grounds that such prayer is idolatry. Over the past half century, the buildings that housed the Prophet and his family have one by one been destroyed, down to their foundations. In the past two decades alone, according to the Gulf Institute, 95 per cent of the oldest buildings in Mecca, dating back more than a thousand years, have vanished.”

Margaret MacMillan in *The Uses and Abuses of History*.

Kim Ghattas points out that the Saud family brought with them to their new powerful role the teachings of the eighteenth century Muhammad ibn Abdelwahhab who decreed a return to the “exact way of life of the prophet”. “In his days, Ibn Abdelwahhab was so extreme in his interpretations that he was regarded as an outcast by his contemporaries. The Ottomans were the first to describe it as Wahhabism, to denote a movement outside the mainstream of Islam, one that seemed intently focused on one man as though he were a kind of prophet. The Wahhabis, with the Al-Sauds as their standard-bearers, tolerated nothing that could come between man and his God: not the intercession of saints, not tombstones in cemeteries or visitation of the graves of loved ones, not even worship of the prophet—all of it was shirk.”

“The House of Saud had used its custodianship of Mecca and Medina to claim leadership of Muslims everywhere, using the pilgrimage as a conduit for its influence around the Muslim world. Wanting to welcome an ever-increasing number of pilgrims all year long to the hajj, it had embarked on huge expansion projects, bulldozing and paving over ancient, religiously significant sites. Medina—where Islam was born—was already lost to savage modernization. The old roads, once lined with stucco houses, their facades ornamented with delicate wooden latticework, had been replaced with multi-lane streets and modern, soulless buildings. The Prophet’s Mosque, al-Masjid al-Nabawi, Islam’s second-holiest site and the second mosque to be built after the one in Mecca, had also been transformed, with gray stone replacing the delicate rose-red stone and graceful Ottoman style, making way for more grandeur.” Faisal’s successor, King Fahd, turned on Mecca, “More ancient neighborhoods were being torn down, and Mecca’s classical Islamic architecture was vanishing rapidly. Ugly modern buildings were rising, and more chain hotels were being built to accommodate yet more pilgrims. ... The royals had no appreciation of history, while the clerical establishment, obsessed with keeping idolatry at bay, cheered the destruction. ... the history destroyed in the inner sanctum of the Holy Mosque could not be rebuilt. The arched gateway, known as Bab al-Salam, Gate of Peace, through which the prophet had walked to pray by the Ka’aba, had long since been removed. Even the frame of black marble that had been inlaid in the stone floor to mark the gate’s historical location was gone. The *matraf*, the open, circular area where pilgrims circumambulate around the Ka’aba, had been enlarged, again and again, repaved with heat-reflecting white marble. To allow this extension, historical pulpits, ancient gates, everything had been removed, including the building covering the miraculous well of Zamzam, which had quenched the thirst of Hagar, Abraham’s concubine, and their son Ishmael. The water of the well had been diverted underground and the original opening paved over, its location marked with a black circle on the white marble. The buildings around the mosque were growing taller, the view from the Ka’aba to the hills surrounding the holy city was slowly being obstructed.”

The Americans may be the masters of creating soulless buildings but they were not responsible for the massive damage being done to Saudi Arabia’s Islamic heritage. The Saudis chose to destroy in the name of suppressing idolatry.

Just to the south are the cities of Sana'a and Shibam in Yemen. Here too their fascinating architecture and decorated facades are under threat, mainly from war but also from people's apparent preference to build and live in concrete boxes. Though I cannot help wondering if Saudi influence is at work there too. So when peace finally comes to Yemen what will be left? Both cities are on UNESCO's World Heritage in Danger list but it is limited in its power to stop people shelling a priceless heritage.

## K K is for KOMODO

"One evening Frank told us about the giant lizards which live along the banks of the Digimo river, which drains Lake Kutubu. He himself had had only a quick glimpse of these lizards; but one of the station's boys had, a couple of months earlier, been present at the killing of a lizard that was almost six feet long. He and his friends had gone back to the spot the day after, with a bigger canoe, to fetch the animal, but it had been almost eaten up—apparently by other lizards. 'They are terribly shy and difficult to catch sight of,' Frank said. He had once seen them at a distance when they were swimming across the river and thought they possibly belonged to the species *Varanus Komodoensis* which can be found on a few Indonesian Islands."

So they go out with rifles and camera. The water is still, the heat oppressive, the place is in near silence. Then a lizard is seen swimming back to the mud banks and disappears into the jungle. They drift on without great hopes. And then their interpreter stiffens... "In a second I was looking right into the monster's eyes. Only four or five yards from us, on the mud bank, a giant lizard had raised itself up on its forelegs. The sun was shining on it, so I could clearly see its scaly head—something between a crocodile's and a snake's. It gazed at us in terror and a long forked tongue shot out between its pointed teeth. It looked frightful. It was a moment before I could pull myself together to seize my camera and click it; and at the same time the lizard spun round and disappeared quickly into the darkness; only then did I see that there were not one but two lizards."

That was Jens Bjerre writing in *Savage New Guinea* in 1964. If there really were Komodo Dragons in PNG then the question is—have any survived?

The answer is yes. Except that the large lizards in New Guinea are not exactly the same as the Komodo monsters. They all belong to the same species, *Varanus*, but there are differences in habits and proportions including the ability of some New Guinea lizards to climb trees. The island of Komodo lies off the western end of the Indonesian island of Flores between it and Sumbawa. And visitors come there for one thing only—to see a Komodo lizard.

I heard recently that the numbers of Komodo 'dragons' was declining though not why. Have they sold too many to zoos around the world? Is it to do with disease, climate change, population growth on the island?

Komodo is a small hilly island with savannah country of grassland and trees. It was used as a penal colony and most of its inhabitants are descendants of those convicts. It is surrounded by relatively pristine waters of coral and seagrass beds and popular with divers.

But the threat to the large lizards comes mainly from smugglers. I found this hard to picture. One thing to slip a galah or bluetongue lizard into a bag but hardly a fully grown Komodo lizard. So I assume people sneak off with baby dragons. So what happens as the lizards grow? The creatures are not fussy, eating humans, water buffaloes, anything down to small birds and their own kind. And they depend not on their teeth or their tails or their claws to pull down their prey but rather on their venomous saliva to kill. I rather hope that gangsters and hitmen are not the customers for those smugglers; it would be a disturbingly effective way of getting rid of their victims.

Many zoos *do* have a pair of dragons though that is not quite the same thing as seeing them in their native habitat.

## L Lis for Labrador.

I tend to think of Labrador in terms of Wilfred Grenfell and low-flying planes of the Canadian military scaring the wildlife. Undoubtedly Dr Grenfell was of more use to Labrador than the military. William Pope introducing *The Best of Wilfred Grenfell* wrote, "News came to the Mission of the great need for medical services along the Labrador coast. The climate was harsh, the people poverty stricken, and living conditions had few refinements, but Grenfell eagerly volunteered for this work.

"His first contact with Labrador enchanted him. He marvelled at the beauty of sea and sky, of the bays and inlets, some fiord-like in appearance with rocky cliffs of great height rising almost perpendicular from the water. He urged the captain of his small ship to enter many of these waters but found him reluctant to do because of the many shoals and unseen dangers in these uncharted seas. Grenfell promised himself that one day he would have his own boat and would visit these beautiful areas all along the coast.

"Grenfell was no less impressed by the people of Labrador. They might be poor but they had a generous spirit. Grenfell would treat the sick in shack-like, isolated homes, and would be offered a cup of tea without milk or sugar because these commodities were lacking. Before leaving he would usually gather the family and any neighbors who might be nearby for a prayer and a Christian message. "I must tell the people why I have come," he would say to his medical associates, "so they too may know Christ in their daily lives." His sermons were made up of little stories taken from his own experiences along the coast that his hearers could identify with. To him religion was as natural as breathing, and he felt compelled to share the gospel of the Good News with others.

"Always his beliefs must be expressed in good deeds, and his Christianity was ever seeking a practical expression. First came his medical work which saw four hospitals and eight nursing stations established as well as a hospital ship that journeyed along the coast. He founded a children's home, a sanatorium for tubercular patients, a farm, cooperative stores, and an active handicraft centre."

He traveled by dog-sled, by kayak, as well as by more conventional means to reach isolated patients. And he wrote prolifically. Some of his books are of dramas survived, such as *Adrift on an Ice Pan*, some are stories he collected such as *Down to the Sea: Yarns from the Labrador*, some are of the medical work such as *A Labrador Doctor*, but they all combine his faith with his life's work.

He came into conflict, as a Temperance advocate, with those who wanted to sell liquor to the local Inuit families. He notes a different problem in his book *What Christ Means to Me*, "I can remember being blamed because my critics claimed that starting a lumber mill in order to give labour to hungry families, was not a rightful use for "mission" funds. Not a few criticized us severely for so problematical a venture as introducing reindeer into Labrador. When we accepted a gift of a site for a hospital on Caribou Island, Labrador, the deed stipulated that I must not sell pork or molasses, or enter into trade there. At that time it seemed an insult to an English surgeon that he had to sign his name that he would not go into the grocery business. But the time came when it was apparent that that was exactly what Christ would do in that situation. Most of the necessities of life had to be imported in Labrador. The people lived on a truck or peonage system, and were paid in kind and not cash. They did not know the value of the fish they caught or the price of the things which they were buying. I remember being bitterly assailed for sending the *Trade Review* telling the prices of our produce and our necessities, into different sections of the Coast. I was openly pilloried because I collected a series of "accounts" spread over a period of years, and analysed them in order to assure myself of the ability of the country to support its people. Indeed, I once became so discouraged with the poverty and recurring diseases of both children and adults, diseases which resulted from malnutrition and chronic under-feeding and lack of proper clothing, that I journeyed to British Columbia and made an agreement with the Prime Minister to send over two hundred

families to sites selected on that seaboard, he to advance the passage money and see that they got a fair start. This, however, the Newfoundland Government of the day refused to permit. When at length we actually preached cooperation, and started a cash co-operative store, we at once became anathema; and when later we started such a venture four miles from a trader's station, he, an ex-politician, set wheels in motion not only in the press, but in political circles, and a commission was sent down purporting to inquire into our activities, but really with a view to disclosing our economic turpitude."

He then relates this back to the Bible: "Personally, I never felt that the Sermon on the Mount, or the healing of the blind and lepers, brought Christ to the Cross. It followed so closely after His actual interference with the money changers, that I have no doubt but that the devil of greed for gain which still ruins so many of our men in power, had most to do with His enemies coming out into the open."

So what of modern Labrador? A *Lonely Planet Guide* to Canada says, "Undulating, rocky, puddled expanses form the sparse, primeval landscape of Labrador. Home to Inuit and Innu, its 293,000 sq km sprawl toward the Arctic Circle. If you ever wanted to imagine the world before humans, this is the place.

"Inuit and Innu have occupied Labrador for thousands of years. Until the 1960s they were the sole inhabitants, alongside a few longtime European descendants known as 'liveyers,' who eked out an existence by fishing and hunting from tiny villages that freckled the coast. The interior was virgin wilderness."

They go on to say, "Labrador is cold, wet and windy, and its bugs are murderous." So you might wonder why anyone would live there by choice. It does have "the oldest burial monument in North America. A small roadside plaque marks the 7500-year-old site." It does have "the largest open-pit iron ore mine in the world" in Labrador City, though I think Australia is pushing past it. Then there is the Torngat Mountains National Park with "otherworldly scenery of spindle peaks and rocky headlands that plunge to a turquoise river basin" and is "nature at its wildest." And it is "also an important area for scientific research, with some of the world's oldest rock (3.9 billion years) and a rare population of seals in a freshwater lake habitat. The Kaumajet Mountains south of the park also make for an out-of-this-world hiking experience." That doesn't really make a reason to start booking tickets. But Grenfell found it beautiful so I will take his word that Labrador *is* beautiful.

## Or LANCASTER.

"At the top of the hill is the ruined castle, mainly built by John of Gaunt, Shakespeare's 'time honoured Lancaster'. Here he bred warhorses, held his magnificent and cosmopolitan court, was the patron of minstrels, of Chaucer. Here his second wife Constantia laid out the Queen's Garden of vineyard and arbours, wild geranium, lilies, mallow, sorrel and columbine. Here later, the unlucky Mary, Queen of Scots, Rousard's 'belle et plus que belle et agréable Aurore', spent years of her imprisonment, her plight in the rheumatically castle only alleviated by hawking on Hanbury Hill, hunting in Needwood Forest 'sixteen dishes at both courses', and casks of Burton ale, in which her letters were also smuggled during the Babington plot. 'I am in a walled enclosure on top of a hill, exposed to all the winds and inclemencies of heaven. Within the enclosure there is a very old hunting lodge, built of timber and cracked in all parts ... the sun can never shine upon it ... nor any fresh air come to it.' "

Caroline Hillier in *A Journey to the Heart of England*.

So what, if anything, is left of the castle? Well, quite a lot actually. A *Lonely Planet Guide to England* says: "Lancaster's most imposing building is the castle, built in 1150 but added to over the centuries: the Well Tower dates from 1325 and is also known as the Witches' Tower because its basement dungeon was used to imprison the accused in the infamous Pendle Witches Trial of 1612.

Also dating from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century is the impressive twin-towered gatehouse. Visits are by guided tour only as the castle is used as a Crown Court.

“Also imprisoned here was George Fox (1624-1691), founder of the Quaker movement. The castle was heavily restored in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to suit a new function as a prison, and it continued to house Category C prisoners until 2011 – the A wing of the prison is part of the guided tour.” (As well as Lancaster, George Fox was imprisoned at Carlisle, Scarborough Castle, Leicester and Launceston.)

And there are guided tours every day if you fancy having a look around.

## Mis for ... KLAIPEDA

James Herriot in *The Lord God Made Them All* writes of being offered the chance to go with a cargo of pedigree sheep to the Russian port of Klaipeda. I had no idea where Klaipeda might be other than that it was somewhere in the Baltic. He writes, “Klaipeda is, of course, the old Lithuanian port of Memel and I had previously read that, when the Russians took over, a proportion of the native population was deported and replaced by Russians. I was unable to ascertain the extent of this and since Klaipeda is now part of the Soviet Union I shall refer to all the people I met as Russians.” He makes the port itself sound pretty grim (but then most ports are) though the people with their friendliness and passion for self-improvement and education are interesting.

“Once outside the harbour we began to make our way through the streets. Klaipeda is a town of 100,000 inhabitants and we headed for what we thought was the centre of the place.

“The streets on the outskirts were simply packed-down earth and this applied also to the footpaths. Great muddy puddles stood everywhere and there were holes, sometimes three or four feet deep, which had been dug in the footpaths and apparently just left with the heap of soil beside them.

“Apart from the tenements there were old Lithuanian houses and these were in a very poor state of repair with the paint flaking and the roof tiles loose or missing. Many of the houses had little balconies in front of the upper windows.”

But since he wrote that in the 1960s the wheel has turned. Lithuania is now a free and independent nation again. So my question is: has Klaipeda also become Memel again or does it linger on under its Russian name? Stuart Laycock and Chris West say “Then finally, in 1990 Lithuania declared independence and in 1991 it joined the United Nations, with Klaipeda as its main port.”

## And for MANCHURIA

Of course Manchuria is too large a subject to fit in to a few paragraphs. But I was thinking about it because I came upon Edward Behr's *The Last Emperor*. This was Pu Yi who came to the Chinese throne at the age of three and was soon ousted as the country became a republic. The Japanese deceitfully offered to help him reclaim his throne. They installed him as puppet emperor of ‘Manchukuo’ when they invaded Manchuria. He was a virtual prisoner there and knew little of what was going on. After the Russian invasion and the eventual restoration of Manchuria to China he spent time in a Maoist prison being ‘re-educated’ and died in China after a strange turbulent but always restricted life.

At every step Japan used tactics drawn up to deceive: “By 31 May most of the plan drawn up by Ishiwara was complete. Vital to its success was the construction of a swimming pool for a Japanese officers’ club in Mukden. The ‘swimming pool’ was in fact a concrete emplacement for two huge 9.2 inch Japanese artillery pieces, trucked into Mukden under conditions of utmost secrecy and set up in the ‘swimming pool’ emplacement, hidden from prying eyes by fences, tarpaulin and a wooden shed.

“The two guns were manned by a squad of crack Japanese artillerymen sworn to secrecy. One gun was trained on the main Chinese constabulary barracks, the other on the Young Marshal’s small air force base at Mukden airport. Even within the Japanese garrison in Mukden, few Japanese knew of this lethal secret weapon. None of the Chinese did. Most of the Young Marshal’s forces were in any case fighting ‘bandits’ (i.e. communists) in the south, on Chiang Kai-shek’s behalf, and Chiang himself was about to enter Peking’s Rockefeller Hospital for another opium withdrawal cure.

“Another of Ishiwara’s ruses was to have some Korean labourers brought in from the nearby Korean border and, under Japanese supervision, put to digging irrigation ditches which, hardly coincidentally, ran through Chinese farmland in south-westernmost Manchuria. The farmers protested, as Ishiwara knew they would, and attacked the Koreans. Suddenly imbued with humanitarian zeal (for Korean labourers were habitually treated like sub-humans) Japanese troops from the concession garrison quickly came to ‘protect them’.

“Ishiwara’s final trump card was a fake derailment on the Japanese-owned South Manchuria Railroad north of Mukden itself. Special Service Organ agents planted explosives – near enough to make impressive craters, far enough away from the track to do no real damage at all.

“The Chinese were accused of trying to derail a Japanese train and Japanese troops moved in to cordon off the whole area. An additional, unplanned, incident made Ishiwara’s task easier: a real-life Japanese spy was caught and shot by the Chinese in south Manchuria. This, too, provided the Japanese with an excuse to intervene in Manchurian affairs, should they need it.

“As David Bergamini, author of *Japan’s Imperial Conspiracy*, showed in his hour-by-hour chronology of events in both Manchuria and Tokyo, the ultimate deception was that the whole Japanese invasion, euphemistically called the ‘Mukden Incident’, was engineered without the formal approval of the Japanese government: the fiction was, all along, that some nationalist hotheads in the Japanese army had overstepped their responsibilities – but that the government, and the Emperor, were forced, by the course of events, to underwrite and accept responsibility for their actions. The whole affair slightly resembled the famous Gaullist 13 May 1958 ‘coup’ in Algiers – except that, unlike de Gaulle, Emperor Hirohito had approved the whole plan himself, down to its last details.”

Behr says of Kanji Ishiwara, the mastermind behind Japan’s takeover of Manchuria, “Ishiwara was, during his Manchurian assignment, writing a book about all this: he knew that many Japanese staff officers, and some of Hirohito’s own advisers, regarded him as a somewhat maverick visionary, but there was a brilliance in his plan which showed he was an officer of the highest intelligence, resource and imagination.

“The report that finally ended up on Emperor Hirohito’s desk was a classic recipe for the takeover of a foreign country from the inside, using deception, disinformation, terror and a minimum of force – a technique used to such effect later on that when, generations afterwards, historians started debating the origins of the Second World War, the case could be made that it began not with Hitler’s invasion of Poland in 1939, nor his occupation of Austria or the Sudetenland, but with Ishiwara’s Manchurian blue-print.”

So why did Japan want Manchuria, famous for its ferocious winters?

“Japan’s determination, in the 1920s, to take over Manchuria and install a Japanese-controlled puppet government there can only be understood in an overall strategic and economic context, which was even more important then than it is today. Manchuria, with only 9 per cent of China’s total population, was – despite its rugged climate, hot in summer, icily cold in winter – potentially the richest part of China in the troubled, anarchic ‘twenties. It had – and still has – huge mineral and coal reserves. Its soil is perfect for soya bean and barley. Its horseback-riding farmers are among the hardest, most industrious in the world (from their ranks came the tough Manchu cavalry warriors who conquered China for the Ching dynasty in the seventeenth century), and its

economic development, long before the Mukden Incident, outstripped the rest of China – partly because of the sound administration of the murdered ‘generalissimo’ Chang Tso-lin.... By any standards, in the twenties, Manchuria was a valued prize, a hugely profitable land waiting for development: for pre-Second World War Japan, especially, Manchuria was an essential source of raw materials and factories. Without Manchuria’s resources, Japan could probably not have embarked on its policy of conquest over the rest of South-East Asia (beginning with China) nor taken the risk of bombing Pearl Harbor in 1941, thereby compelling the United States to enter the Second World War. Manchuria became Japan’s Ruhr, fuelling its war economy – including its increasingly important war-related industries.”

Japan also wanted Manchuria for another reason.

“It was also to become, after 1931, one of the most brutally run countries in the world ... In Manchukuo’s first few years the brutality was mainly confined to the Manchu, Chinese and White Russian population of Manchuria, so the outcry was far more muted than in the case of the later Nazi occupation of Europe ... There is no doubt that, in time, Japan intended to turn Manchukuo into an official Japanese dependency: in August 1935, the Japanese government officially announced its immigration plan for Manchuria, designed to settle five million people there between 1936 and 1956. The purpose was not merely strategic, but to relieve the then considerable problem of Japanese agricultural over-population at home. Between 1938 and 1942 a force of 200,000 young farm workers volunteered to go to Manchuria and were settled on farms (most of them expropriated from their rightful Manchu owners), which were turned into ‘strategic hamlets’.” And, “Bachelor volunteers apart, 20,000 families a year moved to Manchuria from 1936 onwards, until – by the middle of the Second World War – Japan started losing the command of the seas and was no longer able to ship them out in such numbers.”

Frank Clune visited Manchuria in 1938 and wrote about it in *Sky High to Shanghai*. He could see how Japanese militarization was proceeding but didn’t see it as a problem. He could see their needs in Manchuria. “Ten minutes after leaving the hot springs we arrive at Anshan, Manchuria’s city of iron, where a one-hundred-million-yen company, incorporated in 1933, produces three hundred thousand tons of pig-iron per year for Japanese industry, and by a patent process low grade haematite is reduced and concentrated for profitable operation.” And. “The exodus of Japanese to Manchukuo is the first large scale exodus of Nipponese in the history of Nippon.”

He gives this version of the ‘Mukden Incident’: “The Japanese say that a patrol of six soldiers, led by Lieutenant Kawamoto, were practicing defence exercises along the railway track three miles north of Mukden and two hundred and fifty yards from the Chinese barracks. The night was dark but clear, and the field of vision was not wide. Suddenly they heard an explosion, and, going to investigate, discovered the track had been damaged by a charge which blew thirty-one inches out of one of the rails.

While investigating, they were fired upon from the darkness and immediately returned the fire, whereupon the attackers retreated.

The Japanese followed and were surrounded and fired upon by a large body estimated at between three or four hundred. Kawamoto then sent a man to the commander of Number Three Company, which was manoeuvring fifteen hundred yards away, and another man to telephone from a field station to battalion headquarters at Mukden for reinforcements. At this moment the south-bound train from Hsinking to Mukden was approaching, so Kawamoto stopped the fight while he raced across to the line and placed detonators on it to signal the train to halt. The signals were ignored, and the train raced on at full speed across the thirty-one-inch gap, safely reaching Mukden on time at 10.30 p.m.

Fighting was then resumed.

Reinforcements arrived, under Kawashima, who decided, on the spot, that with five hundred men he had a sufficient force to rout the ten thousand Chinese warriors camped in the barracks. At 5 a.m. the war was over. The Japanese stated that they buried three hundred and twenty Chinese, but found only twenty wounded.

Two Japanese privates were killed and twenty-two wounded. Throughout the night, while this Battle of the Barracks was proceeding, Japanese reinforcements were rushed to Mukden from Korea, Liaoyang, and Port Arthur. A general occupation of the city of Mukden took place after desultory fighting, and at dawn the tally was one hundred and five Chinese killed, and seven Japanese wounded.”

“The parade ground where the midnight battle raged was newly ploughed in crooked furrows, dodging ancestral Manchu graves. And standing in the middle is an imposing obelisk of grey granite to commemorate the two Japanese who were killed in the sequel to the “insolent explosion”. Near the shattered barrack walls are two modest tablets with the names of the two privates who died.”

Despite his admiration for the Japanese and his less than complimentary views of the Manchurians, “For ways that are dark, and for tricks that are vain, the heathen Manchu is peculiar” he managed to step back sufficiently to write, “Half a mile away, alongside the train line, is a second monument to the “incident”, marking the spot where Chang’s alleged soldiers allegedly placed an alleged bomb, and caused an alleged explosion, which allegedly blew out thirty-one alleged inches of Japanese leased property.”

The question is: what kind of life do the people of Manchuria now lead as part of Communist China?

## And MONTEVIDEO

“Montevideo, a strategic base, the hope of any Argentinian political opposition. Montevideo, with its long siestas, its peaceful coastline, its gentle summers, its melancholy poets, its romantic plazas, its streets with green- and blue-tiled doorways, its endless filigree iron railings, the Prado’s rose garden, the Rodó park with its sound of seashells, its curving beaches along its river-like shore, and the perfume of plantain trees on 18 of July Street. Who were those who met near Artigas on the Plaza Independencia, under its four palm trees, or argued in Plaza Libertad at the Montevideo or Ateneo Cafes, about a doomed country nearby?—politicians, army men, actors? The known ones didn’t interest them; these were easy to locate and follow. They were after others: they wanted to know who were the anonymous, exiled workers’ leaders, those who arrived under cover of night with false passports.”

From *End of a Day* by Beatriz Guido.

But then Montevideo stopped being a haven for dissidents from Argentina and entered its own dark night. So what of Montevideo in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Did it save something worthwhile from the past? *The Rough Guide to South America* has this to say about Montevideo: “With a population of around 1.6 million, over fifteen times larger than the second city of Paysandú, Montevideo is Uruguay’s political, economic and transport hub. Founded in 1726 as a fortress against Portuguese encroachment on the northern shore of the Rio de la Plata, it had an excellent trading position and, following a turbulent and often violent early history, its growth was rapid. The nineteenth century saw mass immigration from Europe – mostly Spain and Italy – that has resulted in a vibrant mix of architectural styles and a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

“More relaxed, but less affluent than its Argentine neighbour, the Uruguayan capital has nevertheless seen an economic improvement in recent years, and wisely invested in its culture, infrastructure and beaches. Montevideo may appear humble at first, but this is a seriously cool, confident city.”

And the Plaza Independencia has an odd claim to fame. “The area around the plaza contains eclectic architectural styles, from the rather ugly Torre Ejecutiva where the president performs his duties, to the bulbous tower of the Palacio Salvo, built on the reported site of the first ever performance of tango.”

N Nis for NEW... It got spread everywhere, didn't it, and there were the variations, NOVO, NOVA, NEUW and more. For instance, Canada got both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. I think it showed a distinct lack of imagination. But come with me to ... ah, here's my atlas ...

## NEW NORFOLK

It is a twenty-minute drive from where I live. And my UBD Street Directory says of it: “New Norfolk is a quiet semi-rural town, spreading over each side of the River Derwent. The major town of the Derwent Valley, it presents a delightful combination of history, picturesque scenery and all services. The area's pioneers were Norfolk Island free settlers, who were re-settled in the valley in 1808 when the Norfolk Island penal settlement was abandoned. In the 1860s, hops were introduced to the Derwent Valley and became an important crop. Today, New Norfolk is renowned for a fine collection of antique shops centred around historic Willow Court.” Willow Court was the notorious asylum, now partly re-used and partly derelict.

“Its array of fine colonial architecture has resulted in New Norfolk being classified as a Historic Town. Highlights include The Bush Inn (1815) overlooking the river and St Mathews Anglican Church (1824), the oldest church in Tasmania.”

There are problems with New. New England, New Ireland, New Britain and all the rest have little in common with their namesakes and are instead a sop to someone's homesickness rather than to their willingness to seek out the original names or to use some imagination. And new often implies all that goes with a lack of tradition and instead is something imposed on an old landscape; straight lines and a lot of concrete immediately spring to mind.

But all is not lost. Some News have become very Old and have gently mellowed and quietly developed character and style ...

Nova Scotia, New Scotland, obviously was flooded with arrivals from Scotland. But what about its neighbouring province of New Brunswick? Was it flooded with arrivals from Brunswick in Germany? So far as I knew it was invaded first by the French then by the British, not a German in sight. Its indigenous tribes, including the Micmac and the Passamaquoddy, lost land to both the French and the English. So I turned to Eyewitness Travel's *Guide to Canada*.

And curiously enough there were German settlers but in neighbouring Nova Scotia. The Guide says, “No town captures the seafaring romance of Nova Scotia as much as Lunenburg. In the mid 1700s the British, eager for another loyal settlement, laid out a town plan for Lunenburg. They then offered the land to Protestant settlers from Switzerland, Germany, and France. Although these were mainly farmers, they soon turned to shipbuilding and the town became a major center for the trade. In 1996 the town was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of the best-preserved planned settlements in the New World.”

So where did Brunswick come from? From George III because, besides King of England, one of his titles was Prince-Elector of Brunswick-Lunenburg or Braunschweig-Lüneberg..

## O. O is for OKINAWA

I knew this was the scene of fierce fighting in World War Two and that the Americans remained there. But what of Okinawa itself? I was watching a film about Japanese wildlife both on land and on sea and I was glad to see that some wildlife has actually survived ...

Giles Milton in *Samurai William* says Great Ryukyu, a subtropical island, is today's Okinawa. "This palm-fringed island was one of the few places where Japanese and Chinese merchants could engage in direct trade. Until 1609, Ryukyu had been an independent kingdom and its prosperous rulers had lived in considerable splendour in the lacquered glory of Shuri Castle. Now, their hereditary lands had fallen under the control of the Japanese lord of Satsuma, who hoped that this remote outpost of his fiefdom would continue to be an entrepôt for foreign trade."

Did the Ryukyans want to be part of Japan?

I knew Okinawa still hosted Americans. But Michael Booth in *The Meaning of Rice* says of the Okinawans ... "The last time we visited Okinawa, a decade ago, it was to uncover the secrets of the Okinawans' longevity. The islands of Japan's southernmost archipelago were becoming famous for having the greatest proportion of centenarians in the world. Gerontologists had been flocking there to find out why so many Okinawans lived beyond a hundred years. The reasons, we discovered, included strong social cohesion and genetics but in particular a diet which was low in fat with lots of seafood, tofu, seaweed and vegetables, along with specific additions like turmeric, jasmine tea and mineral-rich black sugar. Crucially, the Okinawans didn't eat too much of anything. Caloric restriction, embodied by the local saying 'hara hachi bu' (eat until you are 80 per cent full), kept their intake much lower than the Western, or even the mainland Japanese average. But already the indicators for the future health of the islanders had been looking less rosy. The generations following those who had survived World War II were ditching the traditional Okinawan diet in favour of Western foods introduced by the occupying US forces: burgers, fried chicken, Spam, and the famous (and quite horrid) Okinawan taco rice. Today, the Okinawans are the biggest per capita consumers of KFC in Japan with a bucket of the Colonel's chicken a common gift at parties, birthdays and – forget silver tankards – christenings. The younger generation of Okinawans are consuming considerably more calories than their parents, and exhibiting troubling levels of obesity, heart disease and diabetes as a result. In fact, as I was now learning, the Okinawans are the unhealthiest people in all Japan, and have lost their longevity crown to the prefecture of Nagano."

"Okinawa is usually depicted as a subtropical paradise of golden beaches, turquoise seas and verdant jungles, but the main island, Okinawa Honto, is a bit of a mess. In the hasty rebuild following the devastation of World War II, quality architecture was not a priority and the ensuing cheap, concrete development means that, today, urban Okinawa is pretty much an expanse of irredeemable eyesores. Garamanjyaku is located amid the worst of it, above the town of Kincho Kunigamigun. Home to a massive US military base, its centre is a sleazy maze of bars and hostess clubs whose chief culinary highlight is the aforementioned taco rice – minced beef with white rice, in a taco."

But Okinawa does have its own culinary speciality, beni imo or purple sweet potato. "On Okinawa, the beni imo is credited with all manner of health benefits, mostly on account of its high levels of vitamin C and betacarotene. Its history here dates back to the turn of the seventeenth century, and has become intertwined with that of [the] islands themselves. The sweet potato arrived via a circuitous route from South America to Spain from where it was taken to the Philippines and then China. In 1605, a local government officer, Noguni Sokan, visited China with a trade delegation. He brought some sweet potatoes back and tried to grow them in his garden back in Okinawa. It was a great success and the crop spread rapidly throughout the Okinawan archipelago. Thanks to the English sailor William Adams, it reached mainland Japan in 1615 where it also flourished, particularly on the south-western island of Kyushu."

## And OSSETIA

John le Carré wrote in *Our Game*, “Carried away by the passion of CC’s outburst, Larry avows his love of Mandelstam.

You know why Stalin had the poet Mandelstam shot? For writing in one of his poems that Josef Stalin was an Ossetian! That is why Mandelstam was shot by Stalin!

I doubted whether this was the reason why Mandelstam was shot. I held the better attested view that he died in a psychiatric hospital. And I doubted whether Stalin was really an Ossetian.”

I must admit I never got the problems of North and South Ossetia, Ingushetia, Georgia and so on sorted out. But I had seen Osip Mandelstam’s name in various books and articles about Russian writers. So this seemed a good time to look at his poetry. And the *Lonely Planet Guide to Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan* notes that Stalin was born in Gori, north-west of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. It is an ancient city, named for Gora = a hill, it was attacked by Ossetians, Mongols, Persians and Ottoman Turks, but the fact of its being Stalin’s birthplace saw it burdened by suitably grandiose buildings, leading the *Guide* to say “Gori is not an attractive city, but still draws people that are fascinated by the figure of Stalin.” You can go to the Stalin Museum, see a statue of the man (and so far it has not suffered the fate of other statues of mass murderers) and visit the railway carriage he used.

But Gori is just south of South Ossetia. The conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia between 1989 and 1992 is over but not fully resolved. “The Ossetians call their land Iristun, which is divided by the Caucasus into North Ossetia, an autonomous republic in the Russian Federation with Vladikavkaz as its capital, and South Ossetia, with its capital of Tskhinvali. Ossetian plans for the unification of the two regions now appear to have been given up as impractical.”

So why did the Ossetians see themselves as different to the Georgians? “The Ossetians are thought to be the descendants of the Alans, who in turn are believed to have been related to the ancient Sarmatians. However, the finer points of their ethnology are still disputed. What is sure is that they speak an Iranian language, and that they settled in the North Caucasus sometime between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.”

“In 1922 the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was formed within Georgia. However a request in 1925 for the creation of a united Ossetian Republic was rejected by nationalities minister Stalin.” So that would seem to be ample proof that Stalin was *not* a South Ossetian; for which they, not having much else to be pleased about, can see as a relief.

## P. P is for Palestine

Palestine as a place, a history, seems much too big to be contained in one of these brief jottings. But I came on an interesting pamphlet put out by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (No 3) by Dorothy Hogg and Muriel Lester, called ‘Dead Sea Doctor’. “The Palestine that I knew in February, 1939, was not a pleasant place. Soldiers, barbed wire, armoured cars, ’buses with windows protected by wire mesh, cars accompanied by military escorts, barricaded roads, bombings, shootings, and everywhere tension and a sense of impending danger. The spacious courtyard in front of the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem was filled with rows of army lorries. Nazareth was one of the most dangerous spots in the whole country. The temptation to despair was very great. Small wonder that defeatism sometimes took its toll of the most valiant spirits. But here and there, in towns and villages alike, were those who still believed in the ultimate

victory of good over evil and had not lost heart. Among them was a middle-aged doctor whose quiet confidence brought consolation to many.

“A Russian Jewess, she had arrived in Palestine about sixteen years ago, determined to find some way of serving the people among whom she had come to live. It was winter time, and for a while she stayed in an old Arab house which was then a hospice in Jerusalem. But it was a bleak building with cold, stone floors, and for the past few years she had enjoyed all the comfort and warmth of American houses. She contracted rheumatism and was advised to go to Kallia, on the Dead Sea.

“Kallia was by no means an hospitable place: there were then no modern hotels. But she found a tiny colony of three Jews who were at work on the beginning of the Potash Plant. Near them she pitched a tent, and lived very simply on ‘pita’, olives and goat’s milk, and set herself to learn Arabic. For she had come to Palestine with a definite purpose. There was work here, she knew, for Jews to do beyond setting up their own communities. If there was to be peace in the Holy Land they must learn to understand their Arab neighbours, and she, as a doctor, might find many opportunities if the language bar was overcome. She practiced her tiny vocabulary on the little Arab shepherd boys whom she met watching their fathers’ sheep among the hills, or driving herds of goats along the roads. The happy-faced youngsters with beady black eyes began to watch out for this kindly stranger who greeted them as her little cousins and told them stories of their common ancestor, Abraham. When she passed their Bedouin homes, black goat’s hair tents, she caught an occasional glimpse of their women folk, and would exchange with them a shy, ‘Sahedi’, Peace, the Arabic for her own Jewish greeting, ‘Shalom’.

“It was when she was out on one of her excursions that she first came to Jericho. Though mid-winter, it was warm and sunny here. Roses were blooming, there were trees and fruits in plenty, and she thought how good it would be to come and settle down in this oasis. People either hate or love the Jordan Valley, and for her it had an immediate appeal with its tamarisks, its bamboos and luxuriant, exotic trees. She decided on impulse to come and live here. Within a few weeks she had found a room with an Arab family.

“News of the stranger’s arrival soon spread, and the Arab villagers talked with interest of the doctor. The only one they knew was a man who came but once in two weeks, dispensed quinine to all and sundry and departed. They began to speculate about her powers. Very soon she was put to the test. Many hours after the doctor and all her neighbours had gone to bed an Arab came cantering across the plain, leaped off his horse and rapped sharply on the door of the house where the stranger lived. Hurriedly he explained that the Sheik, his father, was dangerously ill and implored the new medicine woman to come and save his life. This might well have been a trap, but after only a moment’s hesitation she set off with him at dead of night, on horseback, up into the hills to treat her first patient. She saved his life. News of her skill spread like wildfire. Next day a deputation waited on her with presents of many kinds, all of which she refused to take. But the friendly Arabs insisted that she must accept some reward. If their gifts were not welcome, would she not choose something herself? Here was the doctor’s opportunity. There was one thing, she explained, on which she had set her heart. Would the Arabs, in token of their gratitude, allow her to settle in the village and continue to serve them? Would they sell her a small piece of land on which to build a house. The elders exchanged meaningful glances. It was one thing to sell large holdings at a high price but not good business at all to begin whittling off small plots. On the other hand they certainly wanted her to remain, and it was certain that in that case she must have land. So they cast lots to decide who should sell.

“Soon afterwards the Jewish doctor came to live in her own little house in Jericho, “the city of palm trees”, the little Eden which Anthony is said to have chosen for Cleopatra. Here her rheumatism disappeared. She found herself breathing more easily than ever before and discovered years later that the air of Jericho contains six per cent. more oxygen than the average. She began to

dream dreams in which Jericho became one of the leading spas in the world, widely famed for its marvellous cures and strange beauty.

“But it was not for this that she had come to Jericho. Her immediate job was to help and serve her Arab neighbours and win their friendship and understanding. She found this quite easy. They were kindly and hospitable by nature, and the way in which she dealt with their many ailments won their confidence almost immediately. She waged war on vermin, attacked eye diseases, taught pre-natal care and succeeded in bringing down the mortality rate, especially among infants. Until then some thirty or forty per cent. of the babies born in winter had died in the summer. She set broken legs, treated wounds, prescribed for the common cold, and often when ordinary duties in her crowded consulting room were over, and ill patients had been visited in their own little huts and tents, she would have to set out to the hills to treat law-breakers who had been injured in an affray with the police. Sometimes she was called out to treat the police themselves, and once she sewed up the wounds of seven people who had been mauled by an hyena. Even there her duties did not end, for the simple population believed that a person so skilled in pills and powders must be all-wise. So to her they brought their domestic quarrels and family feuds and expected her to settle them.

“Patients, both Arab and foreign, came from afar to be treated by Jericho’s general practitioner. But after April, 1936, the Palestine troubles began in earnest. She continued her work, however, keeping alive Jewish-Arab friendship amid all the discord and misunderstanding. In 1938, she was still going as usual to the little market town to make her purchases. She could speak Arabic fluently by now, had plenty of friends, and no fear. Then one day her gardener called her to the roof of the house. They stood there together watching a thing she had long known might happen but had always hoped never to see. The British soldiery had been driving the rebels out of the hills and now here they were, these unhappy, disaffected Arabs, swooping down on to Jericho, seeking out enemies and a chance of revenge. She, a Jewess, would certainly be considered an enemy at a time when passions were roused and feeling running high. In such an atmosphere the attackers would not stay to consider the facts of the matter. Only a few days before the Jews from the Dead Sea had wanted to send her an escort and she had refused. She knew that the Arabs of her village and the surrounding district would do anything for her, but they were no longer in control. It was not possible to escape to Jerusalem for there was no one able to drive her there. Nor could she remain in the house. Glancing quickly round for some possible way of escape, she noted the large tree in a neighbour’s yard and decided to take refuge in it. And there she stayed for nearly three days.

“Meanwhile her servant was making frantic efforts to secure a horse or a car but with no result. The villagers explained that they were more than anxious to help but that if they were caught it would mean certain death. Meanwhile it was not likely that she could escape detection much longer. At last, at the eleventh hour, one of her old patients came to tell her that he had found a man who was willing to run the risk of driving her to Kallia, if she would disguise herself as a Moslem woman. So taking nothing but a small bag and her doctor’s diploma she drove with him through the groups of fierce-looking bandits with their double belts of cartridges. They had seized the police station and now had full control. Once more Jericho had fallen.

“The following night, from the Dead Sea, she watched her home go up in flames and with it all those of her possessions which had not already been destroyed or thrown away. Weeks later, after the departure of the Arab bands, she returned to find complete desolation. Not a flower, not a tree, nothing but charred ruins and ashes. Nor could she stay long, for the bandits were not far away. This was her last glimpse of Jericho.

“She still receives messages from her Arab friends showering upon her the blessings of Allah, and sometimes the villagers dare to come to meet her in some secret place and bring her greetings.

“The doctor is about sixty, and has that look of quiet strength that brings to mind the phrase “the wisdom of the ages”. Her hopes are temporarily blasted for her work in the Arab villages is at a

standstill so long as the ‘troubles’ continue. Meanwhile she seizes every opportunity for further service. “I only want to go where I am needed. What piece of useful work can I do next?” she asks, finds it, and carries on.”

Much has changed but bombs, barbed wire, and bullets are still part of Palestinian life.

## And for PISA

I don’t suppose many non-Italians would ever have heard of Pisa if it didn’t have a tower which leans. George Smoot in *Wrinkles in Time* says of it: “Impatient for the conference to end, I rented a car on a Friday afternoon and set off to drive the two hundred miles northwest of Rome to Pisa, an old city on the coast of Tuscany. Despite driving as fast as I dared on Italian roads, I arrived as dusk was falling and feared I would be too late to enter the tower. At a gas station on the south side of this impressive walled city I sought directions—in broken Italian—to the “Leaning Tower of Pisa.” “Ah, *Piazza dei Miracoli!*” replied the attendant, in evident reverence. Assuming we were both talking about the same thing, I followed his instructions to circle the city outside the wall and enter by the northwest gate.

“I hurriedly parked and rushed through the gate, even though by then I knew that I would only be able to see the tower, not go in. There it was, the piazza—the cathedral was directly in front of me, the Leaning Tower looming just behind the cathedral, and between them rose a full moon, its light shining on the white marble of the tower. It was one of those rare times when high expectations are exceeded by reality. The architecture, the dark green grass, and the white marble gleaming in the moonlight made a breathtaking scene I will never forget. I knew then why it is called the *Piazza dei Miracoli*—the Place of Wonders.

“No one needs a reason to visit Pisa, beyond its splendid and unusual architecture. But for me there was another reason: Legend has it that Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) performed an experiment at the Leaning Tower that essentially constitutes the foundation of modern physics and modern cosmology. From the top of the tower he is said to have dropped two objects of differing mass, to see if they would hit the ground simultaneously. They did, thus demonstrating that all falling objects accelerate at precisely the same rate, regardless of mass. In addition to being the first experimental physicist, one who took the study of motion from abstract philosophy into concrete science, Galileo was also the first astronomer to turn a telescope to the sky. The presence of the rising Moon when I arrived at the piazza was therefore doubly appropriate. We understand its motion thanks to Newtonian physics that evolved from Galileo’s experiments; and we understand its terrain thanks to his pioneering observations with a telescope.”

But that isn’t all he got about Galileo. “The next morning I climbed the tower, and, standing where Galileo surely stood, I could feel that such an experiment would have been irresistible. I went from the tower to the cathedral, Pisa’s *duomo*, where an attendant came up to me and pulled me over to the nave, pointed upward, and said: “*Lanterna di Galileo.*” Hanging three stories from the soaring ceiling was the lamp that Galileo had watched while attending cathedral services in the 1580s. It is said that it was Galileo’s responsibility to make sure the lamp was burning, and so he kept a close watch on it. But he did more than monitor the flame. He was a medical student at the time, and he used the regular beat of his pulse to time the swings of the lantern as it was nudged by air currents. Common sense suggests the wider swings would take longer. But Galileo saw that all swings, regardless of amplitude, took exactly the same time: Galileo had discovered the principle of the pendulum.”

I came upon a little guide book to Pisa which gives the history of the Tower. “Apart from its supreme architectural merits, it is really for its leaning that the Tower of the Piazza dei Miracoli is known throughout the world and forms the subject of various aspects of human existence, from literature to song, from physics to the geology of the soil it rises from.

“The work was begun by Bonnano Pisano about 1174 and had reached a height of 11 metres when there was a sudden subsidence of the ground which caused a first inclination of about 15 centimetres; the builder tried every means of correcting the angle from above, but he reached the fourth stage without achieving his aim. The construction was thus interrupted and was only continued in 1234 by the efforts of Guglielmo da Innsbruck, who reached the seventh stage. Naturally, they soon gave up all ideas of constructing a very high campanile with a crowning spire. Tommaso Pisano finished the work in 1350 by reaching the belfry. The ingenuity of the many craftsmen and master builders who worked together in completing the famous campanile was mainly directed towards reinforcing the ground and in gradually correcting the upper stages in order to secure the centre of gravity of the marble mass. In the north side, the campanile is 55.22 metres high, and 54.52 on the south. Despite the constant control of its stability by technicians, the leaning tends to increase at the rate of almost a millimeter each year.

“The theory that the leaning was the will of the builders is no longer acceptable; the fact that largely shows the lack of intention is the alluvial nature of the soil on which the town is built, as is witnessed by the slight inclination of the campaniles of St. Michael degli Scalzi, St. Sisto and St. Nicola.” ... “The surrounding ground has risen over the centuries. The form of the campanile is perfectly cylindrical and of the Pisan Romanesque style which the craftsmen favoured; the mass is lightened by the characteristic blind arches in six orders of columns placed one above the other and divided by entablatures: it is identical with the style of the Cathedral façade.

From the base to the bell housing, the decorative treatment is the same, with arches supported by columns and alternating geometric decorations and doors. The door to the interior opens in the base and is decorated with a carved lunette by Andrea Guardi (Pisan school of the 14th century) that portrays the Madonna and Child between St. Peter and St. John the Baptist.

The inside is, naturally, round and contains a staircase that spirals upwards, creating a huge empty well in the centre. In 293 steps you reach the top; however, there is an exit at every floor that leads onto the respective, which has no parapet and therefore demands the maximum care.”

And when you finally get to the top there are five large bells with two smaller ones above them. And the Tower is part of the Piazza along with the Cathedral “whose ivory-white marble has already the power to carry us completely into another world” and the Baptistry. “The monuments rise from a green lawn, in a happy marriage of nature’s simplicity and the grandeur of art; the whole is enclosed behind by the embattled walls built by Consul Cocco Griffi in the 12th century, as if to defend this collection of priceless artistic jewels.”

## Q. Qis for Quamby

“The next place is Corra Lin, called so from a place of the same name in Scotland; it is a singularly romantic place, and would be a fine subject for the painter; westward of the road are Breadalbane plains, which are said to surpass York plains in richness of soil and verdure: from this place to Launceston, the road passes through Quamby-plains; the farms here are numerous, and of a superior kind; the butter is excellent. Mr. Bromley, of this place, was the first who attempted to make cheese, and very fine it is; which in time will, no doubt, form a considerable article of export; for no country can be more rich and productive, particularly along the banks of the North Esk, which is lined with farms for many miles, giving life to the natural beauties of the place.”

Godwin’s Emigrant’s Guide to Tasmania. 1823.

Simon Cubit and Nic Haygarth in *Mountain Men: Stories from the Tasmanian High Country* say of one such tough ‘mountain man’, Patrick Hartnett: “Hartnett was a pioneer of nature-based tourism in Tasmania. From the 1880s there had been regular experiments of this kind, including Diego Bernacchi’s 1888 Grand Hotel ‘pleasure resort’ on Maria Island and Theophilus Jones’ 1890s Henty River farm tourism resort on the west coast.” He planned routes, hired out horses, provided accommodation, built the first accommodation hut in the wilderness, Du Cane Hut, in 1910, and

“Hartnett also influenced the shape of the Cradle Mountain and Lake St Clair Reserves when they were created in 1922.” And the part of the famous Overland Track between Pelion Plain to Lake St Clair “follows the tracks he made in his hunting and tourism career.”

“In this sense, Hartnett emerges as a significant figure not only in the history of tourism in the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park but also for Tasmania more generally.”

“Patrick Joseph Hartnett was born on 7 November 1875 at Early Rises, a rural property at Quamby Brook, a hamlet a dozen or so kilometres south-east of Deloraine. One of fourteen children of Patrick Hartnett and Mary Collins, he grew up in a strongly Irish Catholic environment and retained a slight Irish accent throughout his life.”

There is a Quamby in Tasmania (it sounds like a small species of wallaby, doesn't it?), but I felt sure it had a namesake elsewhere so I thought I would look for other Quambys. Quamby is said to be a Tasmanian Aboriginal word meaning ‘shelter’. But there was the suggestion that our Quamby Bluff, Quamby Brook, Quamby forest, Quamby plains were all named for Quarmby in Yorkshire. There is also a surname Quamby, most common in the USA. But curiously there is also a Quamby in far north Queensland, a little place near Cloncurry.

So you could take your pick. Quamby in Tasmania is a pretty place near Deloraine and worth a day out. But I think I like my idea best. A little furry quamby with a little joey quamby in its pouch.

## R. R is for RURITANA

Which you will find, not in an atlas, but between the pages of a novel. Anthony Hope created a small country in Europe in his novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* and unlike other countries novelists create it took on a life of its own with people referring to ‘Ruritanian romances’, ‘Ruritanian adventures’, ‘Ruritanian royalty’ ... so what of his imagined country?

Like *The Scarlet Pimpernel* it appealed to a desire for romance, swordfights, castles with moats and dungeons, impersonations, wicked relatives, without needing to have realistic characters or realistic settings.

Hope placed his Ruritania somewhere in the Tyrol region and most characters have German (or Austrian) names such as Fritz von Tarlenheim, as do the towns such as Strelsau. But Ruritania is a curiously uninteresting place. We are told it has hills, forests, elm trees, beautiful gardens, old buildings, but it is merely a rather anonymous backdrop to Rudolf Rassendyll's likeness to the king of Ruritania, dark red hair and a long straight nose, (as he has a remote connection to the royal Elphberg family) and thus the dangers that come with his impersonation of the threatened king. The king has been drugged and imprisoned by his ducal half-brother ‘Black Michael’ just before his coronation. Throw in the king's beautiful intended bride Princess Flavia and you have the desired ingredients for an exotic adventure.

Hope writes, “As soon as we reached the Ruritanian frontier (where the old officer who presided over the customhouse favoured me with such a stare that I felt surer than before of my Elphberg physiognomy) I bought the papers, I found in them news which affected my movements. For some reason, which was not clearly explained and seemed to be something of a mystery, the date of the coronation had been suddenly advanced, and the ceremony was to take place on the next day but one. The whole country seemed in a stir about it, and it was evident that Strelsau was thronged.”

Would it appeal to readers now? I doubt it. Fantasy has become more complex.

But Ruritania acquired a long-lived place in people's imaginations. Perhaps because its very sense of anonymity allowed people to create it in their own minds according to their own ideas. And perhaps, interesting or not, that is where all places live.

## And for RICHMOND

I wonder if there is an English-speaking country which does not have a Richmond? Tasmania has a pleasant little Richmond with old sandstone buildings, tourist sites, an old stone bridge, ducks on the river, and tea rooms. There is a Richmond in New South Wales which also has old sandstone buildings, a river, tourist sites ... I'm not sure about the ducks ... A Richmond in Melbourne, a Richmond in north Queensland, not to mention Richmonds in the US, Canada, New Zealand ...

But are they all named for Richmond just outside of London or was there an earlier Richmond? My assumption that this Richmond was the father of all Richmonds proved to be wrong. Henry VII built Richmond Palace there at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century but one of his perks was the 'Honour of Richmond' in North Yorkshire, thus his choice of name. So I went looking to see if this Richmond deserved fatherhood. In 1086 Alain Rufus, Alan the Red, built a Norman castle there and the little town of Richmond grew up around it. It is now on the eastern border of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. But it too had a namesake. Richefont. William the Conqueror gave out great swags of land to his friends and supporters and relatives. Alain as a relative got a swathe of Yorkshire. But he was one of the comtes de Richefont in Normandy. The earls of Brittany then owned the castle until 1399 when Henry IV acquired it. So I hopped over the Channel to see if this Richefont was still there. The name Richefont means 'strong hill' and it is in Normandy in the department of Seine-Maritime. But it was obviously too small and unimportant to be listed in the various guides to France. Nevertheless it is a pleasant little town so you could call by when you are on a cider and camembert tasting tour or exploring the battlefields of northern France or even take a detour on your way to Paris ...

## S. Sis for SASKATCHEWAN

We had to learn to spell all the provinces of Canada when I was at primary school. It was set so we struggled with names like Saskatchewan. I don't know why it was set. Probably because of that pink empire on which 'the sun never set'. And I don't know that it did us much good though they say any kind of learning is good for your brain. But, except for British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, the provinces did at least have interesting names. And it would have been far more interesting if we had been told what the names meant and why they had been plonked on an area of land.

So Saskatchewan. What does it mean and how did it come to name a province?

Unfortunately the *Lonely Planet Guide to Canada* I borrowed didn't answer this question. So I had to look elsewhere to discover that it comes from the Cree 'Kisiskatchewanipi' meaning a 'rapid flowing river'. They did however say, "For over 10,000 years, the region was populated by the Cree, Dene and Assiniboine people. In 1690 Henry Kelsey of the Hudson's Bay Company became the first European to approach these native cultures to buy furs. In 1774 a permanent settlement was established northeast of Saskatoon.

"The Europeans demanded land, often resulting in bloody conflicts. As more Europeans arrived, tensions increased. In 1865 an estimated 60 million wild bison roamed Saskatchewan, providing food and materials for clothing and shelter for the Aboriginal people. In one short decade, mass slaughter by homesteaders and hunters slashed that population to just 500: a staggering decimation with drastic repercussions. By 1890 most Aboriginal people lived on reserves."

In 1905 Saskatchewan became a province of Canada. But behind those apparently calm facts lies a story of major conflict. "A virtual civil war was fought here in 1885 when Louis Riel led the Métis in defending their land from the government. The children of French fur traders and Aboriginal mothers, the Métis were forced from Manitoba in the mid-1800s and many made their home in Batoche. Frustrated by the government's continual betrayal of treaties, the Métis and a

number of Cree declared their independence from Canada: an announcement met by military force, led by Major General Frederick Middleton. Although outnumbered by 800 to 200, the Métis fought for four days and almost won, but Riel was captured (and later hung for treason).

“Once-prosperous Batoche was devastated and within a few years almost nothing was left except for the church you see today. The historic site is an auspicious place to contemplate the events of 1885, as silent waves of prairie grass bend in the wind.”

He died at dawn in the land of snows,  
A priest at the left, a priest at the right;  
The doomed man praying for his pitiless foes,  
And each priest holding a low dim light,  
To pray for the soul of the dying.  
But Windsor Castle was far away,  
And Windsor Castle was never so gay  
With her gorgeous banners flying!

The hero was hung in the windy dawn –  
'Twas splendidly done, the telegraph said;  
A creak of the neck, then the shoulders drawn;  
A heave of the breast – and the man hung dead,  
And, oh! never such valiant dying!  
While Windsor Castle was far away  
With its fops and fools on that windy day,  
And its thousand banners flying!

Some starving babes where a stark stream flows  
Twixt windy banks by an Indian town,  
A frenzied mother in the freezing snows,  
While softly the pitying snows came down  
To cover the dead and the dying.  
But Windsor Castle was gorgeous and gay  
With lion banners that windy day –  
With lying banners flying.

‘The Hanging of Louis Riel’ by Joaquin Miller. 1885.

## And SOUTHAMPTON

J. B. Priestley wrote in *English Journey*: “I had been to Southampton before, many times, but always to or from a ship. The last time I sailed for France during the war was from there, in 1918, when half a dozen of us found ourselves the only English officers in a tall crazy American ship bursting with doughboys, whose bands played ragtime on the top deck. Since then I had sailed for the Mediterranean and New York from Southampton, and had arrived there from Quebec. But it had no existence in my mind as a real town, where you could buy and sell and bring up children; it existed only as a muddle of railway sidings, level crossings, customs houses and dock sheds: something to have done with as soon as possible. The place I rolled into down the London Road was quite different, a real town. This is a fine approach, very gradual and artful in its progression from country to town. You are still staring at the pleasant Hampshire countryside when you notice that it is beginning to put itself into some order, and then the next minute you find that it is Southampton Common and that the townsfolk can be seen walking there; and, the minute after, the road is cutting between West Park and East Park, and on either side the smaller children of absent

pursers and chief stewards are running from sunlight to shadow, and there are pretty frocks glimmering among the trees; and now, in another minute, the town itself is all round you, offering you hats and hams and acrobats at the Palace Theatre. It would be impossible to say where Southampton itself really began, though I should like to believe that the true boundary is that corner of East Park where there is a memorial to the lost engineers of the *Titanic*, to prove that there are dangerous trades here too. Further down, the London Road changes into Above Bar Street; then the traffic swirls about the Bar Gate itself, which is very old but has so many newly-pointed armorial decorations that it looks as gaudy as the proscenium of a toy theatre; and then once through or round the Bar Gate, you are in High Street. Another quarter of a mile or so, at the bottom of High Street, you must go carefully; otherwise you may lose England altogether and find yourself looking at the Woolworth building or table mountain. One could write a story of a man who walked down this long straight street, on a dark winter's day, and kept on and on until at last he saw that he had walked into a panelled smoke room, where he settled down for a pipe, only to discover soon that Southampton had quietly moved away from him and that his smoke room was plunging about in the Channel. For you see, you can catch the *Berengeria* or the *Empress of Britain* at the end of this High Street." And he explains why Southampton has been so popular as a port. "They would not be here at all, nor would the High Street look so prosperous nor all the women dart in and out of the shops, if there were not an odd narrowing of the English Channel between Portland Bill and Cap de la Hague near Cherbourg. It is this bottling of the water that gives Southampton its double high tides, practically three hours of high water, which is time and tide enough for the manœuvring of these enormous ships. They ought to empty a glass now and again in the wine bars to Portland Bill and Cap de la Hague."

Alas. A friend of mine who lives in Southampton is deeply distressed with the way the town Priestly enjoyed is being turned into something ugly and unfriendly by the developers' obsession with concrete. Fortunately there are still pretty spots in that Hampshire countryside. And another friend sent me a calendar of Southampton which showed several historic buildings. This had the Mayflower Memorial, Tudor House, Bargate, Calshot Castle, Westgate Hall and Medieval Town Walls, Holyrood Church and the Medieval Merchant's House. I hope visitors do not have to struggle past freeways and concrete monstrosities to find these antique jewels.

## **And SWIFT CURRENT**

I came upon a booklet about the prairie town of Swift Current in Saskatchewan. The very word 'prairie' has wonderful connotations of space and freedom. But the freedom for the original inhabitants was not always very obvious. Peter Godfrey wrote in *75 years a city*, "It was the North West Mounted Police who prepared this region for white settlement and who kept the district free of serious strife.

"When the police arrived, and camped by the banks of the Swift Current Creek on August 24, 1874, eight years before the railway came, they began a process of undertaking this corner of the Prairie and opened the door to what would come. They saw a wild country, much of it unexplored, open in all directions, no fences, no ploughed furrows, no houses, hamlets or villages and no roads. There was nothing but the expanse of prairie hills, beaten down in places by the thundering hooves of buffalo and that immense Prairie sky overlooking it all.

"Much of the credit for our quiet growth, and lack of violent encounters, was due to the Mounted Police. Earning a \$1 per day, these rugged men who set many a trail in the Southwest, combined skill, unity, perservance (*sic*) and luck to lay the groundwork for peaceful settlement.

"Tough moments with Indians bands were recorded as were long, lonely hours of riding, fighting prairie fires and always battling the harsh climate.

"Their role expanded as progress, in the name of the great railway, and violence, in the form of a rebellion, approached, happened and became history.

“The Police would protect the advancing railway and the incoming settlers, be a buffer between settlement and Indians, stop the liquor traffic among Indians, protect the growing hamlet, its people and businesses, be called to arms in the Rebellion and buffer again during the aftershocks of that insurrection. They were on hand as the freight lines from Swift Current were established, they investigated thefts, arrested drunks, collected custom duties, enforced the Game Act. They conducted train searches for illegal drugs, liquor and freight train passengers and patrolled for American rustlers who would sneak up across the border to raid ranches.

“These history-making Mounties would play an extra role in the development of Swift Current and district. Many would come to love the area and with their reward of a section of land at the end of a term of service, a good number settled here. In fact, the majority of the early ranchers in the Southwest were former Mounties.”

The same could be said of many towns scattered across the Canadian prairies. As could this: “Indians were not a real problem at the time the Mounted Police arrived in the Swift Current area. Treaty No. 4, signed in 1873-74, was in place with the Cree and Assiniboine. No serious trouble was at hand from the Plain’s Cree, Chippewas and Blackfoot. But, during the next dozen years as the whites and progress arrived, the imposing circumstances brought many occasions of shattered nerves through Indian scares. The Mounted Police were there: the buffer zone.”

Nothing the Indians could do could prevail against the Mounties. “The plight of some Indians left its mark on the history books. Relief rations were issued to some ‘deserving’ Indians and half breeds and most non-treaty Indians were left to fend for themselves and once proud people had to eat horse, dog, etc... some froze, women sold themselves, men escaped in whiskey, while loyal natives were not treated much better than ‘bad’ Indians.

“By 1889-92 there were only a few Indian families left in the district.”

That is the other side of writing local history.

## and ST KILDA

I came upon a mention of a book called *The Life and Death of St Kilda* by Tom Steel and thought it could be interesting. But somehow I never got around to looking for it. The idea came back to me the other day when a friend lent me *Rambles in the Hebrides* by Roger Redfern and he devoted a chapter to St Kilda.

He wrote: “Apart from the small island of North Rona the archipelago of St. Kilda has the distinction of being the remotest place in the British Isles, except for one or two rock stacks not capable of supporting human life.

“The St. Kilda group are really the summits of submarine mountains which have been thrust above the sea and are today undergoing steady, relentless erosion which has led to the production of some wonderful coastal scenery.

“The Outer Hebridean islands of North Uist and Benbecula stand 50 miles west of the Scottish mainland and St. Kilda lies 50 miles west of North Uist and Benbecula. Only on the clearest days can the blue mountain-tops of Lewis and Harris be seen from St. Kilda, far to the east beyond the cloud shadow-dappled sea. To north, south and west the ocean and the sky are infinite.

“If remoteness is not enough to satisfy the adventure in man then surely the other qualities found on St. Kilda are more than a feast. The islands number four, with three major stacks (rock towers standing in the sea) and numerous minor ones; here are found the tallest sea cliff in Britain, the biggest sea stack, the world’s biggest gannet colony, a wren and two mammals found nowhere else and a pattern of past human settlement different to any other.”

The islanders mainly lived on the island of Hirta and lived by their sheep and the seabirds which gave them eggs, meat, feathers and oil. But to get to the birds nesting on the cliffs ... “The men developed a notable tradition as cliff climbers in the quest for these vital items of the community’s economy and the occasional visitor up to 1930 was perhaps most impressed by the

daring of the islanders at work on the sweeping rocks above hundreds of feet of space down to the threshing Atlantic water.”

The other aspect of their economy was their sheep. “The Soay sheep of St. Kilda are unique, being the nearest relative to the true wild sheep now in existence. They are smaller than most of our breeds, long-legged and short-fleeced. The fleece is a dark shade of chocolate, though many lighter coloured animals can be seen grazing the steep slopes today.” The sheep were hand-plucked rather than shorn.

But the remoteness, the difficulty of travel, the lack of medical care, the constant drain of young people away, finally led to the islanders asking to be resettled. And so, “in August 1930 the thirty-six remaining men, women and children were taken off and given homes on the mainland.”

“After 1930 St. Kilda remained uninhabited (except for occasional visits by ornithologists, yachtsmen and a few islanders like MacQueen), a sanctuary for the Soay sheep, Atlantic grey seals and the ever-present birds.

“Soon afterwards the archipelago was sold by the MacLeods of MacLeod (of Skye) to the Marquis of Bute. His intention was to retain the islands as a sanctuary for wild life—the teeming wild life of sea and land birds and native mammals. When he died after World War II the St. Kilda group was left to the National Trust for Scotland.

“Today the Nature Conservancy lease the islands as a National Nature Reserve. At the present time the Army maintain a rocket tracking station there in connection with their rocket range on South Uist and the voyage from South Uist to St. Kilda takes eight hours on a 1,000-ton landing craft.”

If it merely tracked rockets ... they also did experiments in biological warfare ...

Here are treasures, the “great boulder-field of Carn Mòr” the Lover’s Stone, the Great Glen, the rare Leach’s fork-tailed petrel, the great cliffs, the kittiwakes and fulmars and gannets and more; and the mystery of the first inhabitants, the Gleann Mòr Folk, with “their substantial corbelled dwellings with bee-hive annexes and horn-shaped entrance courts”.

“St. Kilda. Undoubtedly the finest of all the British Isles in terms of breath-taking scenery and sheer numbers of sea birds, still retains many secrets. Let us hope that some remain unsolved for a long time, that the islands may keep their unending fascination for those who love the wild places of our earth.”

“Around two thousand years ago, a small band of plucky Celts sailed to the islands of St Kilda, a hundred miles from the coast of mainland Scotland. They brought with them a flock of sheep, ancestors of the modern-day Soays who still live on the island. These small wiry creatures, who look more like goats than sheep, give us a rare opportunity to imagine what sheep might have looked like in Iron Age Europe, a time-travelling peek at the animals who would have lived with one of the most famed and feared peoples of the ancient world.”

Sally Coulthard in *A Short History of the World According to Sheep*.

## T. T is for TANGIER

Tangier is where mysterious people lurk, often up to no good, but is it still a mysterious rather seedy place or is it now a concrete wasteland?

“The revolt of Mauretania, which followed the murder of its ruler Ptolemy by Gaius, was led by one of his freedmen Aedemon, but it could not last long. The conquest of the country was begun by C. Suetonius Paulinus (41-2 A.D.), who in a bold march became the first Roman to cross the Atlas mountains and reach the Sahara; it was completed by Cn. Hosidius Geta by 44. Two provinces were created, Mauretania Caesariensis and Tingitana with capitals at Caesarea

(Cherchell) and Tingis (Tangiers) respectively; both towns, together were Tipasa and Lixus, received colonies of Roman veterans.”

*From the Gracchi to Nero* by H. H. Scullard.

Tangier has had a complicated history. *The Lonely Planet guide to Morocco* explains: “Tangier’s history is a raucous tale of foreign invasion, much of it driven by the city’s strategic location at the entrance to the Mediterranean. The area was first settled as a trading base by the ancient Greeks and Phoenicians, and named for the goddess Tingee, the lover of Hercules, who legendarily pulled Europe apart from Africa to form the Strait of Gibraltar. Under Roman rule, it was the capital of the province of Mauretania Tingitana. The Vandals attacked from Spain in AD 429, followed by the Byzantines, and then the Arabs, who invaded in 705 and quelled the Berber tribes. Tangier passed between various Arab factions before finally coming under Almohad rule in 1149. Then the Portuguese arrived, capturing the city on their second attempt in 1471, only to hand it to the British 200 years later as a wedding gift for Charles II. The English diarist Samuel Pepys lived here briefly, calling it ‘the excrescence of the earth’. Morocco regained control of the city under Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1679, destroying much of the city in the process. They remained in power until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when North Africa once again piqued the interest of the European powers.

“The modern history of Tangier begins here. While the rest of Morocco was divided between France and Spain, strategic Tangier was turned into an ‘International Zone’ of various sectors, similar to West Berlin in the Cold War. France, Spain, Britain, Portugal, Sweden, Holland, Belgium, Italy and the USA all had a piece of the pie, which was managed by the sultan, at least on paper. This situation lasted from 1912 until shortly after Moroccan independence, in 1956, when the city was returned to the rest of the country. During this famous Interzone period, expats flooded in, forming half the population, and a wild, anything-goes culture broke out, attracting all sorts of people, for reasons both high and low. Socialites, artists, currency speculators, drug addicts, spies, sexual deviants, exiles, eccentrics – the marginalia of humanity all arrived, giving the city a particularly sordid reputation.”

Gideon Defoe in *An Atlas of Extinct Countries* says, “Not quite Europe, not quite Africa; not a country, not a colony; a marginal anything-goes airport lounge of a place. The perks included cheap cigarettes and three different postal systems to choose from. The drawback: more sleazy beat poets than you could throw a carpet at.” Among those who went: “Truman Capote, Cecil Beaton, Matisse, Ian Fleming, T.S. Eliot, Orson Welles and Tennessee Williams were all hanging about at some point or other. Nobody needed a work permit, and lots of writers moved there, but very few produced any actual work until they left again. William Burroughs (fresh off ‘accidentally’ shooting his wife dead while attempting the William Tell apple trick) claimed that this was something to do with the spirit of the city, that the ‘air was slack’, that everything had ‘a lack of vigour’. This is very much in the tradition of lazy writers blaming anything but themselves for failing to hit their word count.”

The *Lonely Planet guide* goes on: “When the Interzone period ended, Tangier entered a long period of decline. As the economic base moved on, so did the cultural scene. The city became a dreary port, while retaining the criminality. King Hassan II hated the city and starved it of funding. Street hustlers multiplied, turning off tourists. The number of expats dwindled, until there were only a few thousand left.

“Since 1999, Tangier has been the site of major development, most notably the new port, Tangier Med, and the high speed TGV train line to Casablanca, currently under construction.” Yes, probably a lot of concrete. But there you have it.

Tangier looks across the narrow straits to Gibraltar and Spain but that other mysterious place, Casablanca, is around on the Atlantic coast of modern-day Morocco, looking westward..

## and TIFLIS

Boris Pasternak in his memoir *I Remember* wrote, “During the decades since the publication of *Safe Conduct*, I often thought that if I were to republish it I would add a chapter on the Caucasus and two Georgian poets. Time passed and the need for other additions did not arise. The only gap that remained was this missing chapter. I am going to write it now.

About 1930, in winter, Paolo Yashvili and his wife paid me a visit in Moscow. Yashvili was a brilliant man of the world, a cultured and entertaining conversationalist, a “European,” a tall and handsome man.

Soon after their visit all sorts of upheavals, complications, and changes took place in two families, that of a friend of mine and my own. They were very painful to those implicated in them. For some time my companion, who was afterwards to become my second wife, and I had no roof over our heads. Yashvili offered us a place of refuge at his house in Tiflis.

At the time the Caucasus, Georgia, the life of the Georgian people and some of its individual representatives were a complete revelation to me. Everything was new, everything was surprising. Dark bulks of overhanging mountains towered at the end of all the street vistas of Tiflis. The life of the city’s poorest inhabitants, brought out from the yards into the streets, was bolder and less concealed than in the North. It was brighter and more candid. It was full of mysticism and the messianic symbolism of folk legends which are so favourable to the life of the imagination and which, as in Catholic Poland, turn every man into a poet. The more advanced section of the population showed a high level of cultural and intellectual life that was seldom to be met with in those days. The fine buildings of certain parts of Tiflis reminded me of Petersburg; some had railings outside the first-floor windows which were bent in the shape of baskets or lyres. The city also abounded in picturesque back lanes. Big tambourines beating to the rhythm of the *lezginka* followed you about everywhere and always seemed to catch up with you. In addition, there were the goatlike bleatings of the bagpipes and some other musical instruments. Nightfall in a Southern town was full of stars and the scent of flowers from the gardens mingled with the smells from coffeehouses and confectioners’ shops.”

You might like to see if that image remains a true one ...

## U Uis for Ulladulla.

Charles Francis Laseron begins *Ancient Australia* with “I have stood on the bed of the ocean just as it was 200,000,000 years ago. It was at Ulladulla, a short distance from Sydney on the South Coast of New South Wales. There, at the foot of the cliffs, erosion had stripped the upper layers of rock to expose a flat rocky platform some hundreds of yards in extent. At one stage in the great Permian Period this platform had literally been the bed of the sea. When I visited it, and for a great length of time before, the sea no longer covered it and the sand and mud on the bottom had hardened into rock, but otherwise it was exactly the same as it had been in that remote age. Scattered about were the remains of the creatures which had lived at the time, now embedded in the hard rock. There were large scallop-shells, innumerable lamp-shells, delicate lace-corals, and the plates of extinct sea-lilies. Here and there large boulders protruded above the surface, just where they had been dropped from melting icebergs floating overhead.

“Here, it seemed to me, was the nucleus of a book, a story of Australia with its changing geography and life from the beginning of geological time to the present.”

“Warden Head at Ulladulla, south of Nowra, is one of the most accessible and best localities to study the marine rocks. It must have been near the southern limit of the Permian Sea, for at Bateman’s Bay, farther to the south, the rocks are vertical slates probably of Ordovician age. The cliffs at Warden Head are upwards of 100 feet in height and are composed of shales and sandstones

exceedingly rich in fossils. One bed about 10 feet in thickness is composed almost entirely of the brachiopod *Stropholosa*, and the thin spikes which covered the shells have in places broken off and drifted together to form separate layers an inch or so in thickness. In the cliff face, and on the rocky platform at its base, numerous glacial erratics protrude, varying from an inch or so to five feet across. These are nearly all of quartzite similar to the Devonian quartzites to the west, and the ice that bore them evidently came from mountains which were not far away. Though the ice reached the sea, there is evidence that the land was not entirely ice-covered. Here and there embedded in the rock are pieces of fossil wood, mostly small, though one trunk observed was over five feet in length and six inches in diameter. This must have drifted from the neighbouring land, become waterlogged, sunk, and then been buried with shells and other marine creatures. Its discovery shows that between the glaciers, on the slopes of the hills or on the low land in Permian times there were forests (probably of considerable extent).”

New fossils have been found since he wrote that in 1954. But the book is an interesting reminder that people have found and pondered on fossils for a long time. He writes, “The presence in rocks of objects which simulated the appearance of living things aroused the curiosity of people in the very early days of civilization. It was a long time before the real nature of these objects was understood, and longer still before it was realized what an important part they play in interpreting the past. Ancient Greek scientists were a remarkable and learned body of men, but much of their time was taken up with mathematics and with philosophical conceptions of origins. Some, however, found time for actual observation of their natural surroundings, including fossils. Amongst the first was one Xenophanes of Colophon, who was born about 614 B.C. He noticed shells on mountains in the middle of the land, impressions of leaves in the rocks of Paros, and recorded evidence of a former sea in Malta. These he attributed to great cataclysms of the ocean, during which men and cities were submerged. A little later, about 500 B.C., Xanthus of Sardis also found shells in Armenia, Phrygia and Lydia, and concluded that these areas had formerly been the bed of the ocean, and that the land and the sea were constantly being interchanged. Herodotus, born 484 B.C., was another who recorded fossil shells from the mountains of Egypt, and he considered that Lower Egypt had at one time been covered by the sea, and had eventually been filled in by the growing delta of the Nile.

“Strabo, another Greek, who was born about 63 B.C., is often cited as the father of modern geology. He not only noted fossils, but taught that elevation and subsidence were often on a scale sufficient to affect whole continents, and that there was a continual cycle of change.”

Laserson went to the Antarctic with Douglas Mawson and wrote *South With Mawson*. But was he even then interested in fossils or did Antarctica interest him for different reasons?

Ulladulla has a famous son. Henry Clarence Kendall was born there on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1839 to Basil Kendall and an Irish girl Matilda McNally. He had an up-and-down-life and eventually worked as a journalist before becoming an Inspector of Forests but his health failed and he died in 1882. He wasn't a prolific poet but his poem 'Bell-birds' was in our school readers and his 'Song of the Cattle-Hunters' with its stirring refrain—

As the beat and the beat of our swift horses' feet  
 Start the echoes away from their caves!  
 As the beat and the beat  
 Of our swift horses' feet  
 Start the echoes away from their caves!

—still turns up now and then. But it was timber which brought men to Ulladulla so here is his 'Song of the Shingle-Splitters'—

In the dark wild woods, where the lone owl broods

And the dingoes nightly yell –  
Where the curlew's cry goes gloating by,  
We splitters of shingles dwell.  
And all the day through, from the time of the dew  
To the hour when the mopoke calls,  
Our mallets ring where the woodbirds sing  
Sweet hymns by the waterfalls.  
And all night long we are lulled by the song  
Of gales in the grand old trees;  
And in the breaks we can hear the lakes  
And the moan of the distant seas.  
For afar from heat and dust of street,  
And hall and turret, and dome,  
In forest deep, where the torrets leap,  
Is the shingle-splitter's home.

The dweller in town may lie upon down,  
And own his palace and park:  
We envy him not his prosperous lot,  
Though we slumber on sheets of bark.  
Our food is rough, but we have enough;  
Our drink is better than wine:  
For cool creeks flow wherever we go,  
Shut in from the hot sunshine.  
Though rude our roof, it is weather-proof,  
And at the end of the days  
We sit and smoke over yarn and joke,  
By the bush-fire's sturdy blaze.  
Far away from din, and sorrow and sin,  
Where troubles but rarely come,  
We jog along, like a merry song,  
In the shingle-splitter's home.

What though our work be heavy, we shirk  
From nothing beneath the sun;  
And toil is sweet to those who can eat  
And rest when the day is done.  
In the Sabbath-time we hear no chime,  
No sound of the Sunday bells;  
But yet Heaven smiles on the forest aisles,  
And God in the woodland dwells.  
We listen to notes from the million throats  
Of chorister birds on high,  
Our psalm is the breeze in the lordly trees,  
And our dome is the broad blue sky.  
Oh, brave, frank life, unsmitten by strife,  
We live wherever we roam,  
And our hearts are free as the great strong sea,  
In the shingle-splitter's home.

But Henry Kendall was not all sweetness and birds singing. Walter Stone wrote in the *Bulletin*: “Anyone know how Henry Kendall, generally considered a gentle, mild lyricist, wrote and almost succeeded in publishing ‘The Song of Ninian Melville’? It would be interesting to know whether this vitriolic set of verses was prompted by some personal disagreement between Kendall and Melville, who had just been returned as M.L.A. for Northumberland. Copies of Kendall’s *Songs from the Mountains* (1880) containing the poem were hastily recalled by the publisher, W. Maddock. And ‘Christmas Creek’ was substituted. The *Bulletin* (5 January 1881) noted that ‘the objectionable poem has been eliminated for one of even greater merit’. Maddock’s qualms about Melville’s attitude were apparently groundless, as the poem was published in pamphlet form in 1885 by Whitely and there appears to be no record of any action taken by the victim. Certain it is, however, that ‘The Song of Ninian Melville’ would occupy first place in any Australian anthology of satire.”

Quoted in Jean Stone’s *The Passionate Bibliophile*.

And this poem by Aboriginal storyteller Percy Mumbulla is of a different view.

Tungeei, that was her native name.  
She was a terrible tall woman  
who lived in Ulladulla.  
She had six husbands,  
an’ buried the lot.

She was over a hundred, easy,  
when she died.  
She was tellin’ my father,  
they were sittin’ on the point  
that was all wild scrub.

The big ship came and anchored  
out at Snapper Island.  
He put down a boat  
an’ rowed up the river  
into Bateman’s Bay.

He landed on the shore of the river,  
the other side from where the  
church is now.  
When he landed he gave the Kurris clothes,  
an’ those big sea-biscuits.  
Terrible hard biscuits they was.

When they were pullin’ away to go back  
to the ship, these wild Kurris  
were runnin’ out of the scrub.  
They’d stripped right off again.  
They were throwin’ the clothes an’ biscuits  
back at Captain Cook  
as his men were pullin’ away in the boat.  
‘Captain Cook’

## AND for ULLAPOOL

“Ullapool is a tidy village in a superlative setting on the shores of Loch Broom, some sixty miles from Inverness. I checked into my hotel, then went straight out for a walk, happy to get my legs in motion again. The centre of Ullapool was busy with tourists, who looked uniformly relaxed and happy. Ullapool seemed an entirely agreeable place – prosperous, friendly, very clean. The harbour was dominated by a terminal for ferries to Stornaway on the Isle of Lewis, which lent the waterfront an air of purpose and enterprise, and there were some pleasant shops and galleries to nose about in. I liked it all.”

Bill Bryson in *The Road to Little Dribbling*. Is Bill Bryson a good guide to a happy experience? Quite likely. And I am always attracted to places which are ‘very clean’.

## V. Vis for VICTORIA

Isabella Bird in *The Golden Chersonese* wrote, “I like and admire Victoria. It is so pleasant to come in from the dark, misty, coarse, loud-tongued Pacific, and the December colourlessness of Japan to bright blue waters crisped by a perpetual north wind—to the flaming hills of the Asian mainland, which are red in the early morning, redder in the glow of noon, and pass away in the glorious sunsets through ruby and vermilion into an amethyst haze, deepening into the purple of a tropic night, when the vast expanse of sky which is seen from this high elevation is literally one blaze of stars. Though they are by no means to be seen in perfection, there are here many things that I love,—bananas, poinsettias, papayas, tree-ferns, dendrobiums, dracenas, the scarlet passion-flower, the spurious banyan, date, sago, and traveller’s palms, and numberless other trees and shrubs, children of the burning sun of the tropics, carefully watered and tended, but exotics after all.

“It is a most delightful winter climate. There has not been any rain for three months, nor will there be any for two more; the sky is cloudless, the air dry and very bracing. It is cold enough at night for fires, and autumn clothing can be worn all the day long, for though the sun is bright and warm, the shade temperature does not rise above 65°, and exercise is easy and pleasant. At night even at a considerable height, the lowest temperature is 40°. It is impossible to praise the climate too highly, with its bright sky, cool dry air, and five months of rainlessness, but I should write very differently if I came here four months later, when the mercury ranges from 80° to 90° both by day and night, and the cloudy sky rests ever on the summits of the island peaks, and everything is moist, and the rain comes down continually in torrents, rising in hot vapours when the sun shines; and people become limp and miserable, and their possessions limp and mouldy, and insect life revels, and human existence spent in a vapour bath becomes burdensome. But the city is healthy to those who live temperately. It has, however, a remarkable peculiarity. Standing in and on rock, one fancies that fever would not be one of its maladies, but the rock itself seems to have imprisoned fever germs in some past age, for whenever it is quarried or cut into for foundations, or is disturbed in any way, fever immediately breaks out.”

You have probably realized she is not writing about the state of Victoria. She goes on to say, “Victoria is, or should be, well known, so I will not describe its cliques, its boundless hospitalities, its extravagances in living, its quarrels, its gaieties, its picnics, balls, regattas, races, dinner parties, lawn tennis parties, amateur theatricals, afternoon teas, and all its other modes of creating a whirl which passes for pleasure or occupation. Rather, I would write of some of the facts concerning this very remarkable settlement, which is on its way to being the most important British colony in the Far East.”

“The whole island of Hongkong is picturesque. The magnificent harbour, which has an area of ten square miles, is surrounded by fantastic, broken mountains from three thousand to four thousand feet high, and the magnificent city of Victoria extends for four miles along its southern shore, with its six thousand houses of stone and brick and the princely mansions and roomy

bungalows of its merchants and officials scrambling up the steep sides of the Peak, the highest point of the island, carrying verdure and shade with them.”

And to keep this prosperity afloat ... “Victorian firms have almost the entire control of the tea and silk trade, and Victoria is the centre of the trade in opium, sugar, flour, salt, earthenware, oil, amber, cotton, and cotton goods, sandal-wood, ivory, betel, vegetables, live stock, granite, and much else. The much abused term “emporium of commerce” may most correctly be applied to it.”

Of course the state of Victoria does not officially trade in opium though its police manage to turn a blind eye to a lot of trafficking in hallucinogenic substances. But the thing which struck me as I read this was that Victoria in her long reign managed to spread her name far and wide. Did she feel a momentary excitement every time some colony or municipal body wanted to give her name to yet another township, mountain, river, street, school, or alleyway? Though perhaps not a mews ...

So I have been having a quick look at some of the other Victorias around the world. In fact, I am inclined to think she did better than any other British monarch. Of course there are Georgetowns and Georgias, Elizabeth Towns and Streets, Williamstowns, Maryboroughs and such like. But, apart from the plethora of Victoria-this-and-thats, she even got to have a slice of Antarctica as Victoria Land ...

## And Verdun.

“Beyond Verdun lay the French-American battlefields, where yellow butterflies flitted over the ancient trenches and hawks soared above them. How real, yet so far how indefinable, was the contrast between this old war and the threatening new one which I had left round the corner at Cologne!

“In the deep tree-filled ravines of the Argonne Forest, brambles conceded the former dugouts, and the experimental notes of the first cuckoo echoed uncertainly over half-opened anemones and budding broom. But in the sector where the American Army had fought in 1918, broken trees and dead brown bushes still lay in heaps amid clumps of silver birch.”

Vera Brittain in *Testament of Experience*.

Verdun, according to a *Lonely Planet Guide to France*, “is an economically depressed and profoundly provincial backwater”. “During WW1 Verdun itself was never taken by the Germans, but the evacuated town was almost totally destroyed by artillery bombardments. In the hills to the north and east of Verdun, the brutal combat – carried out with artillery, flame-throwers and poison gas – completely wiped out nine villages. During the last two years of WW1, more than 800,000 soldiers (some 400,000 French and almost as many Germans, along with thousands of the Americans who arrived in 1918) lost their lives in this area.”

Verdun too had its underground cellars and tunnels, which can be toured, but I was pleased to find that something of its above-ground architecture survived. “The Centre Mondial de la Paix has a new permanent exhibit that looks at wars, their causes and solutions; human rights; and the fragility of peace. It is housed in Verdun’s handsomely classical (and classically handsome) former bishop’s palace, built in 1724 and worth a look just for the architecture.”

**W. W is for WISCONSIN and WARNAMBOOL and WORSTER and WARWICK and WAIKATO and, well, how about ... WORMS?**

It immediately brings to mind those useful little creatures some people breed in boxes in their back yards and other people are just grateful that there are some in their cabbage patch. But I assume Worms in Germany has a very different meaning. For a start it is pronounced Vorms. And it has a beautiful Gothic cathedral.

“Worms ... had been a Roman town of secondary importance which achieved a temporary prominence in the fifth century but after its conquest by the Franks it seems to have played only a minor role until Pippin held a ‘general assembly’ there in 764. Diplomas of Charles speak of ‘the royal city’ and later evidence shows that it was the centre of a complex of royal estates and other sources of revenue.”

From *The Age of Charlemagne* by Donald Bullough.

So Worms obviously has been there for a long time. It has in fact been through various name changes and various amounts of destruction. The Celts called it Borbetomagus, the Romans called it Civitas Vangionum, and after the Romans left it received the Latin name Vormatia meaning ‘settlement in a watery area’ which I assume meant a marsh. As the sound V in German is actually written as W it explains the gradual transition from Vormatia to Worms ... though, of course, the local people could have gone for something quite different ...

**X is for ... I immediately thought of Xanadu but then I thought I would look for places beginning with Xin an Atlas and I found ...**

You can probably guess what I found. The vast majority of places beginning with X are in China. So here is an interesting one. Stuart Laycock and Chris West in *Lost Countries* write, “Amoy is known to the modern world as Xiamen (pronounced ‘Sheeya-men’), a bustling port city 300 miles north-east of Hong Kong and at the heart of China’s modern economic miracle. Our word ‘Amoy’ comes from its name as spoken in local Hokkien dialect, *E-mui*. It sits on an island known as Egret Island, from the birds that used to be found here in profusion, though the city has now spread onto the mainland, to which it is now joined.”

It was briefly a pirate stronghold and then “In 1842, the Opium Wars broke out. Britain’s role in these is not exactly elevating – maybe we deserved the title of ‘barbarian’. Essentially, we wanted to sell drugs to the Chinese; they tried to stop us, so we sent in the gunboats. Guangzhou was the main target but we also sent a force to Amoy. The fortified city initially resisted the shelling, but when a land force tried to enter, on the morning of 27 August, it met very little resistance. The inhabitants had abandoned it in one night, having smuggled everything out of it in advance (gold items were hidden in hollowed-out logs). Just as well, as the invaders ransacked the city.

“Under the Treaty of Nanking that followed this one-sided war, Amoy became a ‘Treaty Port’, one of five along the Chinese coast, where foreign merchants could do business with anyone they chose, selling whatever they chose. It began to boom again – Amoy’s inhabitants have a reputation for entrepreneurship. Foreigners were allowed to live in an international settlement where Chinese law did not apply. Amoy’s settlement was on Gulangyu Island. This still boasts magnificent colonial architecture. In the twenty-first century, it has become such a popular tourist attraction that visitor numbers are controlled.”

It had schools, churches, parks, hospitals, a post office which brought out its own stamps, and “Gulangyu Island still has more pianos per head of population than anywhere else in China.”

Xiamen was occupied by the Japanese in WW2 and then the Communists took over in 1949 but there is continuing tension over the small islands just off the coast as Taiwan also claims them. But in 1980 Xiamen was named a Special Economic Zone where foreign firms could form ‘joint ventures’ with Chinese firms, making Xiamen a boom town. Boom towns usually mean pollution, traffic snarls, and ugly architecture but it still might be worth putting your name down to be a visitor if you decide to take a trip to China.

**Y. Yis for Yalta.**

Yalta is where Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill met in 1945. That appears to be its only claim to fame. So where is it? What is it like? It is a town in the Crimea in southern Ukraine (and previously in the USSR) bulging out into the Black Sea. On the south-western side of the peninsula are the towns of Sevastopol and Balaklava, besieged by the British, French and Turks during the Crimean War. And remembered every time you put on your balaclava.

If you travel around the tip you come to Yalta on the eastern side of the bulge and further along you come to Kaffa and Kertch, famous for two different tragedies.

Kaffa. “Possibly the earliest and one of the few, recorded accounts of biological warfare took place in the spring of 1346 when the Mongols laid siege to Kaffa, a walled city on the Crimean coast. After three unsuccessful years in which their own soldiers were dying of the plague, the Mongols tried something new. According to an eyewitness, “The Tartars fatigued by such a plague and pestiferous disease, stupefied and amazed, and observing themselves dying without hope of health, ordered cadavers placed on their hurling machines and thrown into the city of KAFFA so that by means of these intolerable passengers, the defenders died widely. Thus there were projected mountains of dead, nor could the Christians hide or flee or be freed from such a disaster. While Kaffa filled with plague, some of the survivors fled, carrying the disease with them to Constantinople, Venice, Genoa, and other European ports. Within three years, the Black Death (spread by less heinous activities as well) swept Europe, killing a quarter of the population.”

Jeanne McDermott in *The Killing Winds*.

Kertch. Trevor Royde writing about the Crimean War said, “While it is true that the Turkish troops were the worst offenders, killing civilians without mercy and raping the Russian women, the British and the French were not without blame. Houses were ransacked, the booty taken to the waiting ships and, disgracefully, Kertch’s museum was sacked and destroyed. With its collection of early Hellenic art it was an important repository, yet such lofty considerations did not impinge on the thoughts of the soldiers who looted it. Later, Russell came across a hastily written note in the museum condemning ‘*la guerre des barbares*’ but by then it was too late. Age-old statues and tablets lay in shards and the remains of one civilization lay shattered at the hands of those who followed in its wake.

The floor of the museum [he wrote on 28 May] is covered in depth with the debris of broken glass, of vases, urns, statuary, the precious dust of their contents, and charred bits of wood and bone, mingled with the fresh splinters of the shelves, desks, and cases in which they had been preserved. Not a single bit of anything that could be broken any smaller had been exempt from reduction by hammer or fire.

It was a shocking incident, deprecated by Raglan and by Brown who sent in fifty British cavalymen to patrol Kertch and to prevent further outrages, but the damage had been done. When the news reached St Petersburg the Russians were rightly outraged.”

Rosamund Bartlett translating Chekhov’s story collection *About Love and Other Stories* writes: “Chekhov’s most famous story, ‘The Lady with the Little Dog’ (1890), was completed just after he had moved into his new house in Yalta, where it is set. It is a classic example of a story in which there is an open ending, raising questions about love and marriage to which there are no easy answers.”

Chekhov begins his story: ‘People were saying that someone new had appeared on the seafront: a lady with a little dog. Dmitry Dmitriyevich Gurov had been staying in Yalta for two weeks now, and had settled into its rhythm, so he too had begun to take an interest in new faces. As he was sitting in the pavilion at Vernet’s he watched the young lady walking along the seafront; she was not very tall, fair-haired, and she was wearing a beret; a white Pomeranian dog scampered after her.’

Gurov despises women, including his wife, yet chases after them interminably. And the new woman is an exciting challenge.

‘In the evening, when the wind had dropped a little, they went down to the jetty to watch the steamer come in. There were a lot of people strolling about the quayside; they had come to meet someone, and were holding bunches of flowers. There were two particularities of the well-dressed Yalta crowd which immediately stood out: the elderly ladies were dressed like young girls, and there were a lot of generals.’

Then fate plays an awful trick on Gurov. He had only wanted a brief dalliance and instead he falls deeply in love.

‘They sat on a bench not far from the church at Oreanda, looking down at the sea and not saying anything. Yalta was barely visible through the morning mist, and white clouds stood motionless on the tops of the mountains. The leaves on the trees did not stir, the cicadas were chattering, and the monotonous, muffled noise of the sea coming up from down below spoke of rest and of the eternal sleep which awaits us. It had made that noise down below when neither Yalta nor Oreanda existed, it was making that noise now, and would continue to make that noise in that same hushed and indifferent way when we are no longer here. And in that permanence, in that complete indifference to the life and death of each one of us, is perhaps concealed a guarantee of our eternal salvation, a guarantee of the constant movement of life on earth and of endless perfection. Sitting tranquilly next to a young woman who seemed so beautiful in the dawn light, entranced by this magical setting—the sea, the mountains, the clouds, the vast sky—Gurov was thinking that when you really reflect on it, everything is beautiful on this earth, everything that is, except what we think and do when we forget about the higher purpose of existence and about our human dignity.

Someone—most likely a nightwatchman—came up close, peered at them, and then went away. Even that detail seemed mysterious and beautiful too. They could see the steamer from Feodosia arriving; it was lit up by the dawn and already without lights.’

The other day I picked up a book called *Crimea* (КРЫМ) but I can’t tell who took the photographs or wrote the captions as they were in Cyrillic. But it did tell me that, “How many wonders of nature does the Crimean Peninsula, this tiny part of the earth contain! The relic groves, karst caves, the massif of an ancient volcano, rare minerals, curative muds...”

“We propose to begin the journey through the ancient and ever young land of Taurida with Yalta. And it is no accident. Yalta is the recognized capital of the Crimean resorts, not without reason it is nicknamed the pearl of the South Ukraine. In its streets and squares one can see quite a few monuments. But two of them enjoy here a particular respect.

“The history of the nationwide health resort is associated with Lenin, the inspirer and leader of the Revolution. The Memorial of Glory on the top of Darsan Hill is devoted to the memory of those who fighting the enemy upheld the right of the Soviet people to life and freedom, The Eternal Flame - the everlasting memory of the grateful descendants has been lit in their honour.

“The lines of Lenin’s Decree “On Utilizing the Crimea for Treating Working People” shine in gold letters on the marble of the obelisk set up in Yalta. All the life of the resort town is illumed by the light of Lenin’s ideas.” And then there are “Two more monuments in Yalta to the writers - Maxim Gorky and Anton Chekhov the close acquaintance with whom the Crimea is proud of.”

Though I didn’t like the sound of the things the Crimea seems to be proud of: “Near the Sivach Lagoon, at the town of Armiansk and that of Krasnoperekopsk a new large industrial centre is being formed. A short distance from the Sea of Azov a giant of the power industry – the Crimean Atomic Power Plant is being built. The serene landscapes of the foothills, the colourful views of the South Coast change into industrial scenery. In the environs of Kerch excavators are gnawing ore, heavy dump-trucks are rumbling, a sintering plant is blazing; near Bakhchisarai the cement mill is doing its prosaic but vitally necessary work; a deafening din fills the quarries.” But “Yalta in no

way can be called an industrial centre. And it is a remarkable thing about it – the salubrious air of the South Coast should be clean. The town's enterprises meet solely the requirements of the resort. No steel is smelted here, nor grain and cotton sown, nor spaceships built.”

“At Yalta, both Roosevelt and Churchill agreed to repatriate ‘without exception and by force if necessary’ all former Soviet prisoners of war, fugitive Soviet nationals and fleeing citizens of satellite nations. It did not require too much political acumen to predict what fate awaited these men once they were returned to the USSR. Stalin himself had publicly warned that ‘in Hitler’s camps there are no Russian prisoners-of-war, only Russian traitors and we shall do away with them when the war is over’. But Churchill’s signature remained on the document that settled the fate of approximately two million Russian prisoners of war at the conference on the Black Sea. Churchill christened the retreat ‘the Riviera of Hades’.”

Tim Tzouliadis in *The Forsaken*.

But it was not for their health that Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill met here. “Livadia cannot help being recognized. It has been imprinted on hundreds of picture post-cards, in dozens of films: the former Tsar’s estate was turned in 1925 into the first in the world sanatorium for peasants.

“In February, 1945, the Conference of the Heads of the Governments of the Three Allied Powers – the USSR, USA and Great Britain was held here.

“In commemoration of this meeting marked by the important for the post-war world decisions a memorial plaque has been affixed to the building of the palace.”

You might go for waterfalls, wild deer, birch and pine and poplar, but not I think for its beaches ... but one little item attracted me. “One more sight of Yalta – “The Glade of Fairy Tales”, the joy and delight of children. Beyond the carved wooden gate at which the “fine knights” headed by Chernomor keep vigil opens up a world with a face all its own: characters and whole plots of people’s fairy tales, the heroes of the popular animated cartoons.”

And since then Russia has forcibly taken the Crimea away from Ukraine so I wonder how much has changed. Do people still go to Yalta for their health? Somehow I doubt it.

## And for YPRES

“We come through Ypres, once a fine city now smashed and burned to a crumbling shell. We see all that is left of the Ypres Cathedral and the famous Cloth Hall, a few shell-riddled broken walls precariously balanced around a heap of rubble that was once the architectural glory of Ypres. On we march through the town, hushed by the ghost of a fallen city’s calamity. Out through the Menin Gate – just two great shattered walls converging on a torn and broken road that we know is the Menin Road.”

Siegfried Sassoon wrote a poem ‘On Passing the New Menin Gate’ and a note says, ‘The Menin Gate is a war memorial erected in memory of the Allied soldiers killed in France during the Great War. The Menin Road runs from Ypres into Flanders.’

Who will remember, passing through this Gate,  
The unheroic Dead who fed the guns?  
Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate.—  
Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?  
Crudely renewed, the Salient holds its own.  
Paid are its dim defenders by this pomp;

Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone,  
The armies who endured that sullen swamp.

Here was the world's worst wound. And here with pride  
"Their name liveth for ever," the Gateway claims.

Was ever an immolation so belied  
As these intolerably nameless names?  
Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime  
Rise and deride this sepulcher of crime.

Ypres was rebuilt so what of Ypres now?

And another little window into the Ypres of the past. "In medieval times, Ypres prospered as a center of cloth making. The city's warehouses stored acres of imported wool, which were woven into finished cloth sold at the annual Lenten fair. The warehouses attracted rats and mice, so cats were kept to prevent such rodents from chewing on the goods. But the cats also multiplied, eventually overwhelming the city with feral felines that were themselves a problem.

"Ypres' solution was to designate a day during Lent as "Cats' Wednesday," which included a city-wide feast, celebration and parade—and ended with the cats being thrown off a tower. The practice became more popular as superstitions linked the cats to witchcraft and devil worship. The celebration wasn't unique to Ypres—history shows many European towns dealt with their cat populations similarly. Paris, for instance, held a similar event, attended and paid for by the King. But Ypres held on to its tradition well into modern times, earning itself a cruel reputation.

"Thankfully, things there took a turn for the better in 1817, when a lucky tabby is said to have survived the fall. Seeing this as an omen, the people of Ypres decided to cease tossing cats from the heights. But they continued to ring the bells on Cats' Day and in the 1930s revived a kinder, gentler version of the traditional celebration.

"Every three years, Ypres hosts Kattenstoet, the "Cats' Parade." Perhaps to make up for so many years of ill treatment, the modern festival is a celebration of the furry pet. It includes cat-themed lectures, music, dance and theater, along with a grand procession to the bell tower, where plush stuffed toy cats plummet harmlessly to earth."

Gavin Ehringer in *Leaving the Wild*.

## Z Zis for ZÜRICH

A friend of mine was returning home to Zurich and I noticed a magazine called *Lost in Zurich* so I got it for her just in case there was something exciting and new in there for her to do when she arrived home. And it began with a picture of a very strange building. "Those who know animals can protect them", is the motto of *Zürich Zoo*, and the keepers are rather proud of their mini-renderings of natural habitats for the resident 360-plus species. For example, the Kaeng Krachen Elephant Park was built to resemble the pachyderms' Thai habitat. Designed by Markus Schietsch Architekten, the giant tortoise-like wooden structure contains sweeping sand, rock and water features for the eight elephants living within.'

My first thought was that the elephants might prefer to live out in paddocks with trees. My second thought was that maybe Zurich is too cold for elephants to live outdoors. My third thought was that maybe even when given the choice elephants prefer indoor living. Who knows?

Zoos are both a blessing and a contention.

But Zurich has a lot more to offer than its zoo. A lake, old houses, beautiful churches, concerts, art galleries, trains to the green and splendid countryside ... things like that. And of course a lot of hard-working Swiss.

## And ZEEHAN and ZEALAND

This part of the world doesn't have many names beginning with Z and these two are both linked to the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman. Alan Villiers in his *The Coral Sea* gives a potted history of Tasman's explorations:

"If Dutch seamen could not find the way to the Coral Sea round the north of Australia (which they early called New Holland), then they must go there another way. An enterprising Dutch governor of the East Indies named Antony van Diemen conceived the bold move of sailing down the west coast of Australia and then eastward to the Pacific. A voyage along these lines was planned by one Frans Visscher, a "pilot of renown," but though Visscher sailed on the expedition, its leadership was entrusted to Abel Janszoon Tasman, who was perhaps the greatest of the Dutch Pacific navigators, and certainly the most fortunate."

"Tasman sailed from Batavia with the two ships *Heemskirk* and *Zeehan* on August 14, 1642, and from Mauritius on October 8 of the same year. Mauritius was Dutch at the time and offered a convenient port for refreshment and repair before entering the Roaring Forties." He sailed south and then west without sighting land. "They ran almost 4,000 miles before they saw any. On November 24, forty-six days out from Mauritius, they sighted the high mountains of the west coast of Tasmania. With this auspicious beginning it ought to have been a simple matter to discover eastern Australia, which was only a few hundred miles away—thousands of miles of it. But Tasman skirted the tip of Tasmania, which he called Van Diemen's Land, and did not so much as sight a single aborigine or seriously try to follow the trend of the land." Then "Tasman set up a pole with the Dutch flag on it, "took possession of the said land as our lawful property," weathered a blow or two, and sailed away. This seems extraordinary conduct on the part of a discoverer, even one with so large a commission as Tasman had. What he had come across was no barren piece of harbourless desert such as other Dutchmen had discovered on the north-west of Australia. His Van Diemen's Land was a rich, lovely, and fertile island, well forested and abounding in minerals, and containing in its lovely coast line one of the best harbours in the southern hemisphere. But he scarcely looked at the place."

He then landed briefly in New Zealand which he called "Staten Landt, in honour of the States-general" so that Zeeland came later and was then turned into Zealand. Again he sailed away to touch briefly on one of the Tongan islands and then past Fiji. "He reached Batavia on June 15, 1643, having been absent barely ten months. His principal achievement was to give a demonstration of how much better his voyage might have been. One would like to find some of Frans Visscher's letters describing it and giving his views of Tasman. What a round of discoveries! Tasmania, New Zealand, Tonga, the Fijis—and except for Tongatabu, he sailed past the lot. There is no excuse whatever, except his lack of nerve after the incident with the reefs at the Fijis, for not rediscovering at least the Solomons. There is no shadow of excuse for passing to the north of New Guinea instead of to the south, as he was instructed to do. The view is often put forward that Tasman's was intended essentially as a quick surveying voyage, not a voyage of detailed discovery, and that the Dutch were interested only in trade. Finding no peoples who offered possibilities for exploitation comparable to the industrious millions of the East Indies, say these apologists, Tasman hurried by.

"But this is not the view of Antony van Diemen. His disapproval is thorough and his censure outspoken. In a letter to the company at Amsterdam, van Diemen writes: "The said Commander has been somewhat remiss in investigating the situation, conformation and nature of the lands discovered, and of the natives inhabiting the same, and as regards the main point has left everything to be more closely inquired into by more industrious successors." Later, when the same Tasman had again let him down on a subsequent voyage, van Diemen angrily wrote: "We intend to have everything more closely investigated by more vigilant and courageous persons than have hitherto been employed in this service, for the exploration of unknown regions can by no means be entrusted

to the first comer.” ” Villiers comments, “Governor van Diemen did not have to charge great ships at reefs in the hope that they might sail over them: but his criticisms are warranted.”

Tasman’s two ships are remembered in Mt Heemskirk and the zinc-mining town of Zeehan and he has been given a whole island and state to himself, whether he deserves it or not. Not to mention his home province of Zeeland ... And the other ‘might-have-been’ is: would Tasmania have been better off under the Dutch? For its indigenous people the answer must surely be yes, that it certainly could not have been worse.

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Where of all these places might you want to go? The nice thing about armchair traveling is that you can miss the pollution, the street crime, the lost money, the upset tummy, the embarrassment when you mis-pronounce a request, the annoyance of other noisy tourists, the high price of coffee, the fact of fog and rain obscuring your view of famous landmarks, the ‘Closed for Renovations’ on a famous museum ... the suspicious questions of Customs when you return home ... the feeling that you need another holiday to recover from this one ...

Why do we do it? Because those names and places and travel brochures beckon us forward in to the Unknown ...

No armchair, no book, no movie, can quite capture the experience of being there and smelling the place and seeing what the brochures never show and being both helped and annoyed by locals, just as you are probably annoying them with unreasonable hard-to-understand requests ... There is nothing like BEING THERE ... but as I get older the being there becomes less attractive and the reading of an interesting travel book more attractive. Still, I hope I have inspired you to look towards visiting somewhere you might not previously have considered ...

THE END