

Dear

When you were teenagers I longed to visit Ayers Rock - Uluru - and Bill agreed that it would be a good idea to have a holiday there. He did not tell me he wished to go to Alice Springs to meet men who wanted him to think about mineral deposits. Off we went in our new Datsun, Janet 15 or 16 years old, Jon 14 and Ann 12, Chum came too!

After years of drought there had been a deluge. The land had turned into mud. Not only were we bogged! A couple of other cars were stuck, one with a Salvation Army man on holiday; with the best of kind thoughts in mind he stood in the road waving his arms as a great truck, travelling at speed, appeared. This truck was decorated with garlands of coloured lights and was intended to help relieve shortages of material in the Alice. Next day the driver ruefully said that his truck would have got through the quagmire had this man not stopped him.

We listened to the driver's talk of his wonderful vehicle. 'My truck would have gone straight through the bog' he said. Bill adopted this idea, with the result that we got bogged again on leaving Alice Springs. The two men whose car pulled us free said often nobody came that way for six or seven days.

But Bill was born lucky!

At the beginning of our holiday, when we arrived there Bill found the three men he had been - unknown to me - in touch with. We then had a trip round the Northern Territory; it was sad to see so many kangaroo skeletons. There were also a couple of abandoned homesteads. Bill's friend told us his family had walked off their property with what they could carry themselves in a previous drought.

The Inland is a strange country. We saw one sign at a fork in the earth track which said on one pointer Alice Springs and on the opposite side Alice Springs: it seems one could take one's pick...go east or west and still find the Alice!

Our University holiday time was nearly over, with Bill having no thought of my longing for Ayers Rock. The car broke down on our way south. Every now and then there was an abandoned car by the roadside and it looked as if the new Datsun would make another. We stayed there, helpless and without any idea of how to cope until a car stopped to ask did we need help.

They consisted of a man, woman and child. This good samaritan knew all about cars. He examined our disabled Datsun with every sign of pleasure and confidence.

'Your universal joint has gone' he pronounced after he and Bill had turned the Datsun upside down.

We were in the plain country, hundreds of miles from help: our nearest town was Adelaide.

'There's a burnt-out wreck down the road' remarked our samaritan. It's not a Datsun but it's universal joint might be much the same. He and Bill drove to this wreck and turned it upside down,

bringing back this part. Placed in position, the Datson behaved again.

'It will get you back to Melbourne' the samaritan stated. And so it did. Bill reluctantly brought the old part back at my insistence. He told me 'They will take my word' but the Datson people would not; astonished, when they saw it they said they had never seen anything like it. It was replaced free of charge.

I invited the samaritan, his wife and child to a 4-day visit with us here. There was much gratitude in my heart for their rescue of us.

This holiday has been in my mind lately so it seemed you might like to read some memories which will revive your own.

Lots of love from -

3rd May 2005. ALICE SPRINGS - ULURU RECOLLECTIONS

THE FAMILY TRIP Bill, Janet, Ann, Jon and I made with Chum to Alice Springs with Bill in charge did nothing to assuage my longing to climb Ayers Rock. There would be a spiritual experience in entering this ancient world, sacred to aborigines from incalculable times.

And indeed so it proved to be to me.

It was 1963 when I sold my Rio Tinto shares, which had greatly increased in value, to pay for my trip. After the train journey to Adelaide I boarded the bus. The other travellers consisted of a few young men, a couple of old people and the rest middle-aged men and women like myself.

One woman wore a large sun hat which she planned to give to an aborigine. Another showed me a garden trowel she intended to use digging for opals. I brought a large enamel mug which I would ask to be filled with boiling water from the kitchens en route, also a pair of soft shoes for climbing Uluru.

When we entered the bus the driver gave us a lecture on how we were to behave. He was in charge and to be called Captain. We would stop only at specific destinations unless some emergency arose, in which case we were to cry 'Timber!' Although at the rear of the bus there was a toilet it was not to be used under any circumstances.

This edict was tested when a woman developed diarrhoea. Her husband rushed to the driver. He stopped the bus, they got out and attended to her needs while the bus, with passengers forbidden to move, awaited their return from the road behind us. I was glad my mug gave me clean water each day.

Shearers sheds made accommodation for our nights. But toilet facilities were bad, very bad. Sometimes two buses arrived at a spot on the same day. At one place the most make-shift shower had been rigged up in a corner of the verandah, with a few strips of plastic pretending to shield one from view. For me, to have a shower was worth the publicity. The queue waiting to be called to eat was unlikely to be interested in my shower.

Some distance from the Rock there was accommodation lately built for visitors. And there we spent the night.

The next day we were taken through a passage into a chamber in the Rock. This was the girls initiation place: it was a room with a central pedestal whose purpose was apparent, for the abrupt end was smooth, polished by the torso and hips of millions of girls who had lain on it to have parts of their bodies cut away by sharpened shell or rock. It was all too obvious and nauseating: one was glad to leave.

We were not led into the boys initiation chamber; most of us did not wish to go.

We were taken to see one large and lovely rock trough full of water which was actually in the lowest part of the Rock,

Later I mentioned this to Hazel Blackwood, who recognised their name, which I've forgotten. She told me 'Bob has spoken of them.'

The upward path had a couple of tricky patches. I negotiated some, went round others, slipped down a couple, eventually coming to the top, where some young people went sitting.

'You must sign the book' they told me.

A large biscuit tin was produced. From it they took a school exercise book and a pencil. I signed my name.

Feeling I might be unpopular with Captain if I interfered with his schedule I did not loiter as I would have liked. I had the spiritual satisfaction of gazing at a world below where time stood still and wonders were to behold. My yearning to experience this visit and feel some of Uluru's ancient mysteries was assuaged.

On my return to the bus Captain asked 'Did you reach the top?'

'Yes, and I signed the book' I answered.

Captain presented me with a small red brooch which I still have.