

## ***Genealogy buff finds fodder down under***

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My husband and I were fortunate to visit Australia recently. We toured it for four weeks, visiting Sydney, the Gold Coast, Hamilton Island, the Great Barrier Reef, Melbourne, Tasmania and Ayers Rock (or Uluru).

It was a wonderful trip, a trip of a lifetime. We saw beautiful beaches, cliffs, historic places, birds, fish, bats, and the opera “Carmen” at the Sydney Opera House.

We are mostly over the jet lag — which I had never experienced before — and still trying to get over the credit card bills.

We also visited some places that, quite possibly, only a genealogist or history nut would bother to visit.

We visited the New South Wales State Library, located within walking distance from our hotel in Sydney. It was beautiful and reminded me of our Indiana State Library. They were getting ready to renovate the genealogy room, which was quite large, and already had begun moving books to storage. The librarian took us on an interesting tour of the collection, mentioning that one of the things that needed to be replaced was the pink carpet on the floor.

The collection was amazingly similar to our genealogy collection at Johnson County Museum of History and The Indiana State Library. I was surprised at that, not really knowing what to expect. They had quite a large amount of immigration information and also computers available with Ancestry Library Edition Australia.

We visited a cemetery in Tasmania. We rented a car only in Tasmania, thinking it would be a less-crowded place for my husband to “drive on the wrong side of the road.”

It was a small cemetery with perhaps 50 gravestones. It was raining that day, but a caretaker was filling in low places with shovelfuls of dirt from his pickup truck. His dog waited impatiently in his truck, and my husband took a nap in our car.

He was a friendly man who talked about the gravestones and the lovely wrought iron fences that surrounded most of the older graves. The fences, he pointed out, were all of a different design. Concrete barriers about 6 inches above ground surrounded the newer graves.

As we continued driving in the Tasmanian rain, we found our way to Port Arthur, southeast of Hobart. It was the location of the historic convict settlement in Australia. It was used from 1833-50 for the most hardened criminals from England and Ireland. It also was used for juvenile sentencing, boys as young as 9 who had stolen toys were housed in an area away from the adults.

This settlement was known as a reformed prison, which meant only about 150 lashes for disobeying rules and extra food and luxury items such as coffee for good behavior.

The Isle of the Dead, the cemetery for those convicts, guards and their families who died at the prison, was accessible only by boat. The rain had not stopped, and we decided not to take the last section of the tour. We visited the Family History area, where they had computer databases set up to find if you had a criminal ancestor who lived at the penal colony at Port Arthur or Van Diemen's Land.

I found it interesting that even though we were on the other side of the world, I felt at home with the friendly Australian people. They would always offer to snap our photo or take a few minutes to ask where we were from and if we were enjoying our trip. And genealogy is alive and well.

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