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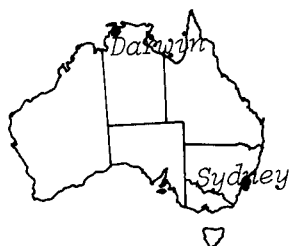
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DARWIN TRIP

22nd April - 8th May, 1979



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We departed from Sydney on Sunday, 22nd April, at 9.05 a.m. The trip was via Adelaide, where we arrived at 10.55 a.m. It was a fine day but very cold. We had to wait more than two hours for our connecting flight to Darwin, stopping over at Alice Springs.

The children were all so excited; for some, it was their first trip by plane and it was one, I'm sure, they will all remember. We arrived, finally, in Darwin at 5.15 p.m. E.S.Time. We almost passed out from the heat; it was 36°C.

Mr Silvey and John Killen met us at the airport. They brought some of the students from Kormilda College with them. We arrived at Kormilda College with enough time to be shown our quarters then we had to rush to dinner.

The college occupies a large section of ground. They have two huge complexes which house the students, an administration block, school buildings, a theatrette, a large library, donated by Rolf Harris, a canteen, and a very large modern dining room which is situated in the centre. There is a modern clinic with a full-time nursing sister. The matron of the college has residence there also. There is a large stock-room, a laundry, and for recreation the college has a huge sporting complex. This consists of two football ovals, a swimming pool, two tennis courts, basketball courts and a couple of volley-ball courts. At the northern end of the grounds there is a large portion set aside for gardening implements. Kormilda College has a driving-school also, and the students can actually get their drivers' licences from the college.

Mr Silvey, the headmaster, lives on the border of the grounds and is readily available at all times. There are over 200 students at Kormilda. Some of the students attend Darwin High School, but the majority have schooling at the college.

The first day in Darwin was spent relaxing and getting over our long flight. We had a tour of Kormilda College, classrooms and the grounds. The children went into the classrooms to observe lessons; some joined in. We then had a tour of Darwin, Fannie Bay, Darwin Harbour, the shopping centre, the Aboriginal dental clinic, and the high school. In the evening we were invited to a social at Darwin High, which was enjoyed by all.

On Tuesday, 24th April, we had a more extensive tour of Darwin. We returned to Kormilda for lunch, then in the afternoon we visited Bagot Aboriginal Community. This proved to be very interesting. We visited their Community Health Clinic, in which there are three Aboriginal health workers. The operation of the clinic was explained in detail. The Aboriginal workers then spoke to the students and explained their role and answered questions. We then went on to the pre-school. Here there is an Aboriginal teaching assistant. Also, they have students regularly for work-experience. We then visited the Bagot Adult Education Centre and the Community store. The store also takes students for work-experience. As Bagot is still being rebuilt, it is an excellent opportunity for the Kormilda boys to have work-experience in carpentry and brick-laying.

Anzac Day was one, I'm sure, we will all remember. We set off early with a picnic lunch to collect a wonderful old gentleman, Djippandawi and his wife Margaret. They took us to Lee Point, where Djippandawi made a spear, then we walked a great distance along the beach to Buffalo Creek. Although we did not spear any fish, we caught a number of mud crabs and collected cockles. Djippandawi showed us where to look for mud crabs. By lunch-time we were all starving. Djippandawi showed us how to make a fire without matches. We cooked our crabs and cockles on the coals. They were delicious. Margaret took us looking for yams after lunch. These were also cooked in the coals and we all had a taste. There were a number of students from Batchelor there and one of the girls sat down beside the fire, mixed up a damper and cooked it in the ashes. When cooked it looked delicious. We returned to Kormilda for a barbecue. Everyone was burnt and tired, but we had had a most rewarding day.

Thursday, 26th April, we went to the Department of Education. The regional inspector was away and his assistant, Mr Davis, spoke to the group. He explained about Caravan Schools and how Aboriginal children are taught in the Territory. We lunched in the Botanical Gardens, then visited Darwin High in the afternoon. It

is always interesting to visit other schools and see how they operate. It was interesting to note that Darwin High has a motor mechanics course and a secretarial course in the school. These are full-time courses and the students spend most of their time in them. They leave these classes only for a couple of periods a week for English instructions. When students leave after matriculation, they are ready for some specific employment. We had a brief meeting with Mr Bill Moira, then the students went in groups to tour the school. In the evening the students went roller-skating.

On Friday, most of the students spent the day at Darwin High. Trevor Walker had to have a tooth extracted and Jamie Cooper had to have a dressing on his knee. As my feet were swollen from the heat, I only stayed at the school long enough to meet Mrs Moira, the acting principal, and have a talk with other staff members, then I returned to the college. The students enjoyed the day at the high school although they complained at first about having to go.

Saturday morning we set out early for Oenpelli. After a long, hot drive we finally arrived at East Alligator River. The tide was high and as we could not cross the river we decided to go and have a look at Obiri rock paintings. The students were fascinated by the paintings and we spent quite some time viewing them. Back at East Alligator the boys decided to cool off in the river; some Aboriginal people on the other side spotted a crocodile and called out. There was some excitement then. Unfortunately, I was at the bus, and by the time I reached the river the crocodile had disappeared. We camped on the river bank and the insects almost ate us alive. The tide did not recede until late Saturday night, and as we had limited time, we were unable to go into Oenpelli. I was very disappointed. We left Sunday morning for Kormilda, stopping at Howard Springs to have lunch and a swim, before returning to the college.

We had a wonderful surprise awaiting us. The Elcho Island boys had hunted lizards and a wallaby, which they cooked in the ground. Then they painted themselves and put on a corroboree. Our children were overwhelmed. They took movies and recorded the didgeridoo and singing. That evening John Lester and I were invited to Mr Silvey's for a barbecue tea and to meet teachers and parents who were visiting from Cobden, Victoria.

Monday, 30th April, the students spent the day at Nightcliff High School. Christine Robertson was not well, her glands were swollen. Sister McKormick took her to see the doctor at Berrimah.

He advised Christine to return home as the heat was aggravating her condition. John Lester took the girls to watch the Kormilda students play competitive basketball after dinner.

Next day we took a trip to Batchelor and Rum Jungle. At Batchelor we were shown around the Teachers' College. We met the Aboriginal students who were doing their Teaching Assistants' Course. This course is for three years; a further twelve months has been applied for but as yet has not been approved. If the extra time is allowed, the students will leave the college fully qualified teachers. There is also a linguistics school at Batchelor, which has quite a number of Aboriginal students enrolled. We had lunch at the college and then went on to Rum Jungle. There wasn't much to see there, but we did notice that the surrounding hillsides are bare of growth, and the water is contaminated and unsuitable for drinking or swimming.

Wednesday, 2nd May, our children went with the students from Kormilda and Cobden to Berry Springs. This was a social picnic and the students thoroughly enjoyed themselves. As Christine Robertson was returning home that afternoon I stayed at the college. Christine's flight was departing at 2.25 p.m., and to pass time, I assisted Lyndy Myers, the Aboriginal teaching assistant to run stencils and collate their weekly magazine called "Tangini". I lunched with Lindy and we had a very interesting talk about her family and Alice Springs.

That afternoon was a very busy one at Kormilda. Everyone was preparing for a dress-up dinner - the end of term 'high tea'. The cook deserved compliments for her magnificent dinner. I was exceptionally proud of Edna Holten, who volunteered to present gifts to Mr Silvey and other staff members. Marcia Ella thanked the staff on behalf of the Matraville students, and Denise Ashby acted on behalf of the Marrickville students.

The next morning we packed and set off for Katherine. It was very hot on the bus, so we stopped at Adelaide River for refreshments. Our next stop was Pine Creek, where we visited the primary school and had lunch in the grounds. We finally arrived at Katherine, hot and tired, and camped at Spring Vale camping site, just outside Katherine. After setting up tents, the children enjoyed themselves in the pool. Although Spring Vale has all the modern conveniences, it does not spoil the beauty of the surroundings.

We paid a visit to Katherine High on Friday morning, and Matraville students were pleased to see their ex-domestic science teacher, Miss MacDonald. Later, we went on to Katherine School of the Air, where we heard and watched a lesson being broadcast. The principal explained the purpose of the school and how it operates.

We arrived at Katherine Gorge in time for lunch. Then, while waiting for our boat, the boys swam and the girls played on the river bank. The trip through the gorge was very interesting. We saw some rock paintings and Jedda's Leap. The students were fascinated by the rock structure and took numerous photos. That night we again stayed at Springvale and left after breakfast the next morning for the Daly River, where we arrived in time for lunch, after a long, hot drive. Everyone had a swim to cool off, then we continued on to a very remote place on the Darwin River, where we spent two very enjoyable days. Two girls from Oenpelli showed me how to recognise signs of sugar bag ants in the trees, and we had some wild honey. That evening the Kormilda girls baked dampers in the ashes. Our children were very impressed. Everyone hung around the hot fire waiting for the dampers to cook; they were most enjoyable. Some of the children went to one of the national parks to see the wildlife.

We returned to Kormilda on Monday morning, and in the afternoon went into Darwin. It was a public holiday and there was a carnival on the beach in aid of the YMCA. There were all kinds of exhibitions - karate, gymnastics, an airforce display. That night everyone retired early.

Tuesday, 8th May, amongst tears and heavy hearts, we left Darwin.

I rang John Killen the next day and he had nothing but praise for the children. He told me that all the staff commented on what beautiful and well behaved children they are and how sorry they were to see them leave.

Our children gained a great deal from the trip. They now have a greater appreciation of the true Aboriginal cultures and customs. New, and I hope lasting, friendships were formed. Also the students have a better insight into the operations of inter-state schools.

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