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Exmouth, Western Australia
1981-82, Term III

During the 1980-81 academic year, I taught in the European Division. At the end of term V at Iraklion, Crete, I received a Telex from Yokota inviting me to teach at H.E.Holt. I RSVP'd immediately – with enthusiasm. Knowing how much there is to see and do between Greece and Australia, Bill Berglof generously allowed me seven months to travel to Western Australia. I mailed my rock samples, books and slides to the education office at H.E.Holt and hit the road.

It took a full seven months to get from Greece to Western Australia because my route took me through Egypt, Israel, Yugoslavia, Italy, Austria, Nepal, Thailand and Melbourne where I spent Christmas with friends. It was convenient that I had friends in Melbourne because I was cashed out by the time I got there. The Aussies gave me a free place to stay ... and put me to work.

Being Chrissie (Christmas), there was a huge party on the beach, complete with shrimps on the barbie. A Santa Claus was required. My friends insisted that every child knows that Santa lives at the North Pole and has a Yank accent. So, it was my job to tie a pillow around my middle, don a red suit and hat and wear a white beard. So there I was on a sunny beach with temperatures in the high 30's – that's 100°F for you Fahrenheit people – dressed from head to foot in warm, red clothing saying "Ho, ho, ho!" in my American accent. One by one, each child squirmed on my lap for a photo and a present. When this was over, I was seriously in need of a long swim in the sea.

Having depleted my funds getting from Greece to Australia, my next challenge was to find a cheap-Charlie way to get to Exmouth, which is about 5000 km away from Melbourne. At that time, domestic flights from Melbourne to Perth cost \$500 AUS, and I'd still be 1200 km short of my destination. Buses were an option, but that would take a week and cost \$400 AUS.

My friends showed me the newspaper want-ads and suggested that I buy a motorcycle. The motorcycles were listed alphabetically: "BMW, Honda, Kawasaki, Motorcycle, Suzuki, Yamaha." I backed up to "Motorcycle." Here was a motorcycle of unknown make or brand with no price listed. I phoned the number. An old woman explained that the bike had belonged to her husband who had kicked the bucket many years ago. If I wanted it, she said I should bring a truck because "the donk is carked up." She added that it wasn't worth a brass razoo, so I could have it for \$50. The price was right!

My friend Rod had a pickup, known in Australia as a "ute". We found the woman's farm at the end of a dirt road. She greeted us warmly with "Are you the nillwits that want my husband's rooted bike? It'll be hard yakka to get it out of the shed and get it running again, but for \$50 you're welcome to give it a burl!"

To get to the back of the shed, Rod and I had to chase away the chooks, move some heavy farm equipment, lift a few bales of rotten hay and dodge the hornets. There, beneath the spider webs, mold and chook poop, was what used to be a motorcycle. We dragged the heap out of the shed. The tires were rotten. The battery had long ago

exploded, corroding the paint on the frame and gas tank. The seat was an ant's nest. Fortunately, it wasn't a heavy bike, so we were able to hoist it into the bed of the ute.

I paid the woman her \$50 and we drove back to Rod's garage. I felt bad about bringing this piece of rust and decay into his spanking clean garage. He said "No worries" as he pointed to his high pressure water hose and the drain in the floor. Then, with gloves, rags and steel wool, I got to work cleaning this thing. The next day, I was chipping away the chicken droppings from the speedometer. There, through the unbroken glass of the speedometer read "Harley Davidson." I almost dropped my chisel.

I spent a week in Rod's garage restoring my little Harley. It turned out to be one of the Italian-made two-stroke Harleys made for the European market in the 60's. I had to dismantle the entire bike to clean up the corrosion. The engine came completely apart to replace the rotten gaskets. The drive chain went into an anti-rust bath. I rewired everything from headlight to taillight. Finally, with new oil, tires, battery, lights, air filter and a re-sewn seat, I got it out on the road. Surprisingly, it ran well. The six-speed transmission was smooth. With its little 90cc cylinder, it didn't have much acceleration but it got great gas mileage. Now I was ready for the 5000 km ride to Exmouth.

But first I had to visit friends in Canberra and Sydney. I reckoned that a short test ride would be a good idea before I tried crossing Australia in the middle of their summer.

On the back of my Harley, I had a tent and a sleeping bag. I planned on camping along the way to save money and to give me a chance to see more of the countryside. The ride up to Canberra meant crossing the Snowy Mountains. I think they got this name because someone once saw snow in these mountains.

I loved the winding roads that led through and over the Snowies. There wasn't much traffic. I had the road to myself. A few times, I forgot that in Australia, people drive on the wrong (i.e. left) side of the road. This is an easy mistake to make on a motorcycle because there's nothing about the vehicle, such as a steering wheel, to remind you which side of the road you should drive on. A few times, I came around a corner and found myself head-on with a car or a ute. I only made this mistake about three times. Fortunately, on these occasions, the oncoming vehicle wasn't going fast, or there was a wide shoulder onto which I could quickly skid.

I remember one special campsite in the mountains. At dusk, I pulled off the highway into a forest of eucalyptus trees by a river. I pitched my tent under the coolabah trees, got some water from the billabong and waited for my billy to boil. A jumbuck came down to drink while I was having my dinner. Corellas were nesting in the trees above me. I fell asleep listening to them coo. It was a perfect night of camping.

The next morning, after I ate my brekkie and packed my gear, I started the bike. Though my little Harley didn't have the deep roar of a chopper, it had enough of a bark to startle all of the corellas into panic. I cowered as the whole forest seemed to scream and then take off with a thunder of thousands of wings flapping. I was sorry to have wakened all the birds so brutally. After the birds flew off, the quiet returned. I eased out onto the winding highway, being careful to remember to drive on the wrong side of the road. With the corellas gone, it was quiet again. My little Harley putted along.

That's when I heard footsteps. Running footsteps. It was an odd sensation on this calm, quiet morning to hear someone – or something – running behind me. I checked

my rear-view mirrors, left and right, and saw two big reds coming up from behind. I checked my speedometer. I was doing a leisurely 10 mph in 1st gear.

The two roos came up even with me, one on my left and one on my right. With me sitting on my bike, our eyes were all about the same height. I looked at them. They looked at me. I quietly shifted into 2nd gear and accelerated to 15mph. My companions didn't skip a beat. They weren't even breathing hard.

I decided to try 3rd gear to see if they could keep up with me at 20mph. They increased their cadence and stayed right with me. They didn't have any trouble matching my speed.

I advanced the throttle to 25mph. They were still with me. Each roo was about a meter to my left and to my right. I admired them – such strong, sleek animals. Then, they seemed to wink at each other and accelerated to 40mph in just two hops. They took off, waving their tails at me and leaving me far behind.

The road came to a sharp left hand turn. Instead of turning, the roos flew over the deep culvert beside the road, bounced to the top of the hill overlooking the road, turned around and watched me as I leaned and banked into the turn. I was clearly outclassed by their speed and maneuverability.

I had many wonderful adventures on that bike, riding through Canberra and Sydney, running down the Sapphire Coast from Sydney back to Melbourne, and passing the Twelve Apostles on Australia's South Coast.

On the south coast of Australia are erosional features known as the Twelve Apostles. A few have collapsed since 1981. There are now only 7 visible from this viewpoint.



West of Melbourne are a string of beach towns with friendly pubs perfect for a pint and a meal at the end of a long ride. At one of these pubs, I remember coming in, sitting on a stool at the bar, and putting my helmet on the stool beside me. A fellow nearby asked what I was riding. I didn't lie when I said I was riding a Harley. This seemed to give me a lot of credibility and legitimacy at the bar. A few other folks gathered around and we

had a good time. The cold amber flowed freely until 10pm, which was when bars in this town were required to close.

I thought it was odd to close an Aussie bar at 10pm. I asked my new friends what was the point of that? They laughed and said “No worries! We make the bars close early so that we can go party at our places. Come with us, mate!”

They all piled into their utes. I followed on my Harley. We drove out to a big barn which was set up as a theatre and a private pub. The friends I’d made climbed up onto the stage, plugged in their amps and started tuning their guitars. As we all helped ourselves to the keg, the band started singing “Do you come from a land down under? Where women glow and men plunder? Can't you hear, can't you hear the thunder? You better run, you better take cover.” Former UMUC instructors are old enough to recognize these lyrics. By chance, I’d met the band later known as Men At Work.

The next morning, my musical friends sent me on my way to visit their mates in Adelaide. There, I got some cautionary advice about the road ahead – specifically, the long deadly highway that crosses the Nullarbor Plain. This is the middle of Australia where there’s nothing. Not even a tree. Hence the name, Null Arbor. It’s flat, arid and very hot. There are no towns or gas stations. It’s not a good place to ride, especially in December which is Australia’s summer.

When I got to Port Pirie, I bought an economy seat on the India Pacific Railway and put the Harley into the mail car. It took three days to cross Australia. The train was chockers with young folks heading back to Perth after the holidays. My traveling companions were a Catholic girls’ school and a rugby team. Being New Years, I don’t think anyone slept. The games and the costume parties went non-stop day and night.

On the second afternoon, halfway across the bleak and desolate Nullarbor, the train came to an unexpected halt. We were in the middle of nowhere. There were no roads, fence posts or telephone poles. Everyone puzzled as to why the train had stopped. We got out of the train and walked to the engine to ask what was going on. Why were we stopping here? The conductor wouldn’t give us an answer, nor would any of the other staff on the train. The bartender winked.

When our train stopped in the middle of the Nullarbor, I took this photo. It’s the classic shot of train tracks going off into infinity on a perfectly flat plane, converging to a point on the horizon.



Then we heard the sound of an airplane. It was a small prop plane. It bounced to a stop next to the train. The bartender came out of the train and asked the rugby team to give him a hand unloading. We all looked inside the plane and saw that it was full of beer. Evidently, our train was about to run out of beer. With still a day and a half left to get to Perth, the train conductor and bartender knew they'd have a riot on their hands if they ran out of beer. Only in Australia.

Arriving in Perth, I got some sleep at the home of friends I'd made on the train. From there, I headed north 1200 kilometers to H.E.Holt for my assignment with UMUC. After seven months on the road, I still remembered that I was to teach seismology and astronomy on Australia's Northwest Cape. But, before I got to H.E.Holt, there was still going to be a memorable ride alongside the Indian Ocean.

Halfway between Perth and the Northwest Cape is the micro-nation of the Hutt River Province. Curious to find out what this place was, I turned off here and followed a dirt track across the desert. In the middle of about 75 square kilometers of nothing, I found a house, a barn, a tool shed and a well.

I was greeted warmly by Prince Leonard Casley. His wife gave me lemonade. They stamped my passport – one more country, yay! – and told me their story. A decade before, Mr. Casley found himself near bankruptcy due to the imposition of wheat quotas. Unable to sell his wheat, Mr. Casley found a loophole in the Australian constitution enabling him to secede from Australia. Since then, his micro-nation had thrived by printing its own currency and postage stamps which are still sold worldwide to philatelists and numismatists. The Hutt River Province, though not officially recognized by the Australian government or by any other government, is nevertheless larger than Monaco, Nauru, Tuvalu and San Marino.

One night, I camped out on the beach beside a large bay. The sandy beach was wide and free of litter or footprints. There were no houses, shops or boats. Like much of W.A., it was deserted. I went for a swim at dawn to rinse off the dust. With my mask and snorkel, I headed out into the bay. The water was incredibly clear.

Oddly, the floor of the bay, which was all sand, looked out of focus. Then I realized that the sandy floor of the bay was coming to life. I watched carefully. Rays had been sleeping on the floor of the bay, just under the soft sand. My swimming had awakened them. Like a giant flock of birds, they spread their dark wings and began to skim across the bottom of the bay. I hovered motionless above these rays and watched for about 10 minutes as thousands of these rays woke up and glided beneath me out into the deep blue waters of the Indian Ocean.

As I continued north towards the equator, the daytime temperatures were brutally hot, in the mid 40's. There was no way to ride in the daytime. The heat and mirages were intense. I worried about the engine overheating. During the day, I slept in the shade of bridge overpasses or culverts. I rode at night.

Although free from heat, I encountered a new problem when riding at night. The nocturnally-active kangaroos responded strangely to my headlight and the sound of my engine. As I rode across the desert, the roos would stand by the side of the road. Then, just as I passed them, the roos would panic. They had a dangerous habit of jumping directly towards my headlight. After nearly colliding with three roos, I did what I had to do. I unplugged my headlight and rode without any light. The moon was nearly full so I could see the road ahead as I rode across the desert in the cool night air.

With no headlight, I arrived at H.E.Holt Naval Communication Station at midnight on Saturday, January 9, 1982, during a lunar eclipse. The security guard at the front gate looked at my Harley, my long hair, my dirty clothes, my tattered passport, my crumpled orders, and the moon ... and asked me if I wouldn't mind spending a few days in the brig. "No problem!" I said. Honestly, I was delighted to have an air conditioned cell, hot showers, a flush toilet, American TV and three squares a day.

By Tuesday, a message from Pearl Harbor confirmed my orders. I was released from captivity, given a haircut, presented with a spacious BOQ, and began a thoroughly delightful term teaching seismology and astronomy at one of UMUC's most remote assignments.

H.E.Holt is at the extreme northwest corner of Australia. There are unexplored, untouched limestone caverns nearby which made for exciting field trips for my geology students. The year before my arrival, seismic surveys had detected a large natural gas field just outside the base. While I was teaching here, the gas company allowed me to take my students on field trips of the site to see the exploration and drilling equipment in action.

With extremely dry air, no clouds and the nearest city more than 1000 km away, the night skies were ideal for learning the constellations and observing meteor showers. This was an excellent place to teach astronomy.

I would have extended my stay at H.E.Holt except that UMUC needed me in Korea. I looked sadly at my little Harley. He served me well all the way across Australia. There was no way that I could take him with me. One of my students bought the Harley from me and got a very good deal on a collector's item that's probably quite valuable today.

Here's the 90-cc
Harley that took me
across Australia.

