

# DISCOVERING AUSTRALIA

by Bellita Pane

I had been in Australia for three and a half years when I decided to have a really good look at the country and its people. I was then working in the Eastern States and wished to go to Western Australia, some 2,000 miles away. The most practical way to do this would have been the conventional methods, such as car, plane, train, etc., but how uninteresting; so I thought about it a while and came up with the idea of using a HORSE.

But how to obtain a horse suitable for such a journey of at least 1500 riding miles. It must have an easy comfortable pace, be able to walk well, and, most important, be quiet in traffic. Having shopped around for a time I found a horse dealer who knew what I would need, and he came up with a pinto which he had trained and used as a rodeo pick-up horse and had all the attributes previously mentioned.

He was 16.3 hands, dark brown and white, handsome in a heavy built way. The dealer then found me a pack-horse, a grey, 15 hands, and a good pace to fit my Pinto. This dealer was also to find me the saddlery I needed, including an American style cowboy saddle with the horn on the front to tie the pack horse to. This saddle is good for walking and very comfortable but I haven't discovered how one does much else in it!



I also found a Kelpie dog to keep me company and named all of my animals by Australian slang names; — Fair Dinkum is the Pinto, meaning the truth or a reliable person, Smoke-oh, meaning a lunch time break or midmorning snack, for the pack horse, and the dog was called Digger — he's still digging! None of my arrangements would have been possible without the very

able help of the people I had been working for and the use of their car and advice and knowledge of the people of Gosford.

The day arrived which had been set for departure and it was raining, but this did not dampen my spirits or my nervousness that I had "bit-ten off more than I could chew." There were a lot of people to see me off and I know there were bets that I would not even get over the mountains, let alone to Port Augusta 1200 miles away. At Port Augusta I was to entrain the horses for Kalgoorlie, as it would have been foolhardy to try and ride the 1100 miles across the Nullabour Plain, and extremely uninteresting.

The first day of the trip was not entirely successful; I did not saddle my horses, and whether I can blame this I don't know, but about fifteen miles out the pack slipped and before I could do anything Smoke-oh had bucked the lot off, which was a fair bit, all over the road, and departed for home. He was caught, luckily for me, about a half mile back, but the saddlery was all over everywhere, amongst some trees, and down a gully, and on the road. I had a boy with me to show me where to go for the first night and he helped me collect the things and a car took them on. On inspection it proved seven straps were torn, the saddle tree broken, and one of the bags was ripped, the camera and the gun broken. This was not the only incident of the day as we encountered our first of many bad and stupid drivers, a semi-trailer truck came round a corner and let its air brakes off, right beside me. My horses did nothing but the pony the boy was riding deposited him and the saddle in the ditch and frightened the boy quite considerably. If only people would think before they try to be funny, without considering how dangerous it is.

The next day I returned to where I had started, in a car, and had the damage repaired and a new saddle tree sent up from Sydney, and was able to return that night to proceed the next day, all intact again.

I passed through perhaps the hardest part of my journey in the next three weeks crossing the Blue Mountains which form part of the Great Divide. Here the snow can be very deep at this time of the year

but our luck was in the snow, was very cold and windy and wore five thicknesses and a wind jammer. The horses did not seem to suffer at all, apart from running noses in the morning. They were never rugged at night and had a very good winter coat. The road was pretty hard on them being very steep and narrow bitumin. A loaded horse seems to find it a hard to climb up as to descend. We only averaged about ten miles a day the first two weeks. Over the whole distance we averaged about 20 miles a day, taking eighty days to cover the 1575 miles actually ridden. It was about 250 miles to get out of the steep hilly country. We rode about five days a week, resting the other two days. This seemed the best way to keep the horses fit and not too tired. It is very tiring on oneself to ride a tired horse.

When I got out of the scenic mountains I passed into very rich wheat and sheep country, leaving behind the dirty coal mining town of Lithgow and moved south to the real "country" town of Bathurst and on to Cowra. I was very fortunate in receiving an invitation to look at the Red Shadow stud for trotters; and here many mares came to be serviced from all over Australia, and two stallions from America stand as well as some top Australian stallions.



I feel I should say what a marvelous reception I received from many people in the towns I passed through, and on the properties I stopped at. I was wished good luck and many a friendly wave from passers by and taken into the homes of many kind and generous people, giving me a bed for the night and a paddock for the horses. A number of them insisted I should stay an extra day or two to rest the horses and to have a look at some parts of the district. Only one night in the eighty days riding did I have to camp and cook my

own meal! The horses were fed on grass, but if I could find hard feed they had it. The horse is never used in many areas in Australia today and is quite a novelty, so many farmers do not bother with chaff and oats but it had been a good rainfall last year so the grass was very good. When I finished the ride the horses were thinner, but not drastically so.

Digger came in for quite a bit of attention because it is a long way for a dog. He never had sore feet until about four miles out of Port Augusta. Then he was able to rest for about three weeks as when I reached Kalgoorlie I spent two weeks with my mother and family in and around Perth, leaving the horses in Kalgoorlie.

Smoke-oh often caused me trouble as the grass is always greener the other side of the fence, and he was an adapt escape artist. One evening he hopped a 40-gallon drum and various poles and wire netting I had put in a gap in a fence; he had hobbles on, too! He ended that night tied to a tree.

Shoeing was quite a problem, I had to have Dinkie reshod after only 75 miles. It was very lucky for me that, although the art of shoeing is dying out, each time I wished to have them shod I was able to find a person to put them on; I carried a set of shoes for each horse and it wasn't till about 100 miles from Port Augusta that I had to use them. One set of shoes lasted 416 miles!

After the wheat country we moved into the main irrigation area of Australia called the Riverina. It is a large district using water from the Murrumbidgee River. It is irrigated by various methods, through canals with pumps and water wheels, reticulation actually on the river, and a series of dams used mainly for stock watering. Here rice, fat lambs, wheat and oranges are grown, and due to the irrigation it is one of the richest land areas in Australia today. Griffiths is the main centre for the irrigation. It is really a thriving town and most attractive to the visitor, with the atmosphere of growth and a great future.

From here we went into the salt bush plains around Hay, and this perhaps could be called the irrigation area of the future. The proper-

ties here average 60,000 acres and depend mainly on the sheeps back. There is much poetry written about this district, perhaps "Hay, Hell and Booligal" is the most famous, by Banjo Patterson. The plain is covered with salt bush, the main diet for the sheep, and is reknowned for its black mud in the rainy season and it has caused many a traveler to stay longer than intended.

Turning south we reached Swan Hill where we crossed the Murray River into Victoria. This town is right on the borders, and the bridge is the boundary. When the pubs close in Victoria there is a general exodus to New South Wales where the drinking hours are longer! It was also once famous for its paddle steamers. These were used for transport of wool to Adelaide. There is one preserved here for future generations to remind us of our pioneering ancestors.

Travelling north and then west we crossed the north wheat belt of Victoria. Here soil conservation is used extensively as the pioneers in their haste to clear the land did not realize what they were doing, and the soil is very light and drifts easily. To hold it they plant trees and under sow the crops with legumes.

We again crossed the border into South Australia, this time at Pinnaroo. In many places I received hospitality from the Country Womens Association, who were extremely kind in arranging beds, etc., for me. These women work for the better conditions of the women in the country and do a great deal of hard work for various worthwhile causes. Thus I had the wonderful chance to meet many families I would never have met otherwise.

Recrossing the Murray River, at Purnong landing, on a ferry, we moved on into the Barrossa Valley, where the wine, known all over the world, is grown. This country is very like England, and here one sees many deciduous trees, a great relief to the eyes after the interminable Gum trees which, though very beautiful, one ceases to notice after a while.

We were now traveling north. Reaching Laura. I was asked to stop over a day and was taken into the most fascinating town of Port

Pierie. Here is the only town in the world with three railroad gauges. This dates back to the feelings of enmity between the states.

Only one hundred miles to go to Port Augusta where I entrained the horses for Kalgoorlie.

As mentioned before, I left the horses in Kalgoorlie for three weeks while I spent time with my mother, over on a visit from England, and then returned to continue the last 375 miles to Perth. This stretch was the driest and I had food for the horses sent to various sidings for the first 120 miles. When we reached Southern Cross I was persuaded to stay five days to lead the parade for the opening of the swimming pool.

Just outside Kalgoorlie I visited a mission for Aborigines, and this was very interesting. I also visited a gold mine in Kalgoorlie. They will not take women underground, so I was only able to see what happens to the ore when it is brought up.



It took me four weeks to complete the last 375 miles of my journey. There were no incidents or anything unusual. I had become used to the foolish drivers and interested spectators and wire and bottles on the side of the road. The horses arrived in Perth in reasonable condition after their journey and I sold Smoke-on, keeping Fair Dinkum and Digger.

During the journey I spoke to four schools, did about six broadcast recordings and five television appearances. It is an amusing thing to be famous for a while, but a great relief to return to normal afterwards, but one is never allowed to forget completely!