



TUMBLEWEEDS TRAVELLING.

They're a mob we spent August holidays with on her mother's Mongogarie farm in the sleepout, feeding chooks, pouring creamy warm milk less than an hour out of the teat onto our morning porridge, winding up the old party line phone, feeding the fuel stove, playing cow-pat cricket.

Old Mrs Young lived alone up in those remote hills for as long as I could remember. Meg, her only daughter, was no longer at the Coraki nursing home. I tried the three aged care places in Casino then realised that the Catholic Church was the place I needed to go.

I found her in the cemetery beside her husband Bill and motorbike loving son, David. I wondered where the

grave of her baby daughter was. She bore 10, lost two.

On to the Bruxner Highway where the road climbs steeply through dripping Dicksonia shrouds to reach the wind-bitten high country via Tenterfield to my next stop with dear friends from teaching days out of Glen Innes. Lambing all done, my friend drove the Toyota over the paddocks like it was a stockhorse; she and her dogs expertly moving the sheep out onto the road, separating the older lambs and distributing through various gates to find pasture just right for their fattening.

We chatted endlessly; how can two people find so much to talk about? On the last day she took me to a place near Inverell carefully set aside by

local Elders and generously made available to visitors for secret women's business. It's a place where a young woman, so it is told, was turned to stone for eloping with a man of the wrong skin. You could see her there bent to the stream, sipping.

Turning west by the Myall Creek I photographed a turquoise ground parrot in a moment of joy before following the excruciating story trail telling of the massacres; stories largely unspoken and unheard in this country where we prefer to look across the seas for horror and heroism. Facing our own is still too hard. But at least this one went to court.

Moree is a proud and prosperous looking place these days, not as I recall it

as a child. What I most remember from those days was the sign at the baths 'Whites Only'. I needed that one explained back then, though it became front page news not long afterwards when Charles Perkins et al took the Freedom Ride bus up there to confront it. I dropped in at the Courthouse this time. Yep, it was an Aboriginal child being questioned by the magistrate. I shouldn't have seen that. There should have been a Closed Court sign. But there wasn't.

I did swim at the warm mineral pools this time round and rejoiced that now all skin colours share the fun and, somewhat surprised, I heard there a Babel of languages.

At the Art Gallery, a fine building, I was surprised to find no local Indigenous art in the gallery shop but for a painted rock (which now lives next to my TV).

A short trip almost to the Queensland border and here was Boggabilla. My son's high school, Sydney High, has a long relationship with Boggabilla Central. We enjoyed billeting some of the kids who visited.

I dropped in at a local Indigenous-owned paper-making business. The women running and working there showed me their work and the local artwork on display. Out I walked with an armful.

Unpacked my lunch in the grass above the MacIntyre River and watched the kids, a campfire burning on the sandy shore, swim and play squealing and frolicking while keeping an eye out for each other. Would the scene have been any different forty-thousand years ago?

Collarenebri was where my grandfa-

ON THE ROAD AGAIN



EMUS AT THE FENCE.



GLEN INNES SHEEP.

ther came to do some building work in his later years. Because of relationships he had built, my brother got to visit the local landowning Maple-Brown family as a child, flying up there in a Fokker Friendship and returning with all sorts of tales of adventures in the bush. Collarenebri's Indigenous population lived on the river then. Now the whole town is theirs. Much of the town appeared to be boarded up. No more the old picture theatre.

Tootling down there on a deserted back road early in the morning the slow drive and sparkling morning gave me wonderful wildlife moments. Too boggy for my little town car I had to give the marshes a miss so headed on into Warren, a lovely warm town that has blocked the entry of trucks to its main street.

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was palpable in that place. In the street I chatted to a group of high school girls who told me they loved school and were thrilled to be now learning their own language, Gamilaraayi, their birthright.

The October long weekend arrived. Down the road on Wailwan Country a group called RiverSmart had arranged for some walks and *en plein air* artists' opportunities on the Macquarie Marshes.

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