

Back from the USA



Paul Cockram reports on three months in the USA accompanying his partner Alison Alder

Los Angeles CA

It's 12,319 km from Canberra to Los Angeles in the air as the Boeing 737-800 flies. Tall passengers pay a circulation tax of \$175 should they be fussy enough to want enough extra legroom in the hope of avoiding deep vein thrombosis.

The arrivals hall at LA International Airport is reminiscent of a Braidwood cattle sale. The people are penned in and prodded along, appraised by digital technology, squinted at and stamped by an official and finally loaded onto busses or taxis for dispatch to the city.

First stop was Venice Beach, the final

resting place of the Woodstock generation, maybe not dead yet but certainly mostly resting. There are heaps of souvenirs on sale along the promenade. There are tea towels, teddy bears, flags and even underpants all emblazoned with the unambiguous message: "F*CK TRUMP". The president it seems is not popular in California.

On the beach the skate boarders' series of bowls is a popular spectator sport. It's all self-regulated with sectors suitable for varying levels of skill, from learner to death-defying. The day we were there a pint-sized (600ml) girl had the crowd wowed. Although dwarfed by the older mostly male riders, she was accorded maximum respect for her

seemingly effortless speed and skill. Our first foray on LA busses was a day of confusion. We had quite a few disagreements about navigation. I have a theory on this. People, like bees and birds, use the sun to navigate. I think that we southern hemispheroids automatically know that when the sun is somewhere in the sky in front of us, west is on the left and east on the right, give or take according to the time of day.

Plonk us down in the northern hemisphere and of course it's back to front; when the sun is in front we're facing south and east and west are reversed. That's my theory and I'm sticking with it as my excuse for repeatedly going the wrong way.

Our hosts in Venice Beach, Carol and Ted, are a couple of mature-age lefties who've never given up the fight. Carol

is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Political Graphics in downtown LA. The CSPG has an archive of over 90,000 human rights and protest posters and prints. Alison spent a day there merely scratching the surface.



2018 SPRING

FROM OUR OZ TO DOROTHY'S OZ

Kansas Cities KS & MO

Our next stop was Kansas City KS. When you tell someone from west coast USA that you're going to Kansas the response will most likely be, "Oh, you have relatives there?" And yes we do in fact, but hot on the list as a holiday destination for most Americans, Kansas is not.

Alison had an auntie who was a war bride. Beryl Alder met an American GI at the end of WW2, fell in love and made the switch from urban Marickville girl to wife of a farm hand on the vast rural Kansas flatlands.

Auntie Beryl and Uncle Clarence had two children, Murlin and Melinda who still live in Kansas City KS. There are two Kansas Cities separated in some parts by the Kansas River. Where cousin Melinda lives though, you can walk to the shops in Missouri, buy a bagel for lunch, then walk back home to Kansas to eat it.

I wondered why most of Kansas City is not in Kansas State but actually in Missouri and Cousin Murlin who is an avid history buff explained it thus:

French fur trappers and traders were the first Europeans in the area in the 1700s and ultimately established a post because of the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. Both were French spellings for the Native American tribes in the area. Missouri became a state in 1820 but Kansas, just to the west of the confluence, remained as Indian Territory not open to white settlement until 1854, and subsequently became a state in 1861.

The Missouri side developed as a town called Kansas City because of the Kansas River, several years before the Kansas side also called itself Kansas City.

There was a very violent history from 1854-1865 as pro-slavery guerrillas from Missouri and free state guerrillas from Kansas waged a brutal war with each other until the end of the Civil War.



THE COUSINS' AIRPORT GREETING. MELINDA, HER DAUGHTER ALINA AND MURLIN.

After a few days too soon it was time to head for Braidwood Illinois where I wanted to stop over for a couple of days and meet some locals. Melinda kindly offered to drive us to Chicago with me hopping out in Braidwood.

Leaving Kansas City is a lot less stressful than leaving, say, Sydney for Canberra. It's just an easy drive along some suburban streets then on to Interstate 35 and set the cruise control for Illinois. But first we had to get through Missouri and that's where we stopped for lunch at a country diner.

As it turned out, the Simply Country Café in Brookfield is famous in the region for the quality of its cakes and pies. After lunch we complimented the staff on their friendliness and proprietor Stacey confided, "Y'know what? When I go to Chicago and I see that sign, 'Welcome to Illinois' ... well, they lie!"

"The moment I get back to the state line I go down on my knees and I say, 'thank you Jesus, I'm back in Missouri'."



BWD