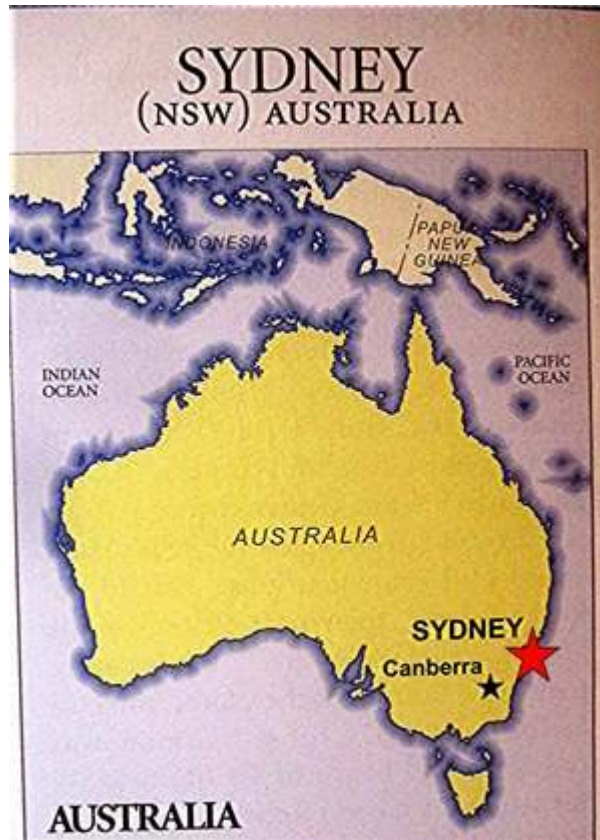


## Sydney, Australia – Day 49 Nov. 15:

We woke up about 5:30am just at daybreak. We were off the coast of New South Wales (NSW) Australia near Sydney in the southeastern part of the continent, as shown in the map on the right.



The headlands of Sydney Harbour were visible in the distance as the Amsterdam steadily approached. We hurriedly got dressed and went up to the Crow's Nest Lounge where we could hear the commentary of Travel Guide Barbara Haenni describe features of Sydney Harbour. Sydney Harbour is one of the most beautiful harbors in the world and, as the saying goes, words don't do it justice. Instead of more words, here is a picture we took as the Amsterdam arrived today.



This panorama catches the Sydney Tower near the center and the Sydney Opera House on the right.

The Amsterdam was docked at the Overseas Passenger Terminal in Circular Quay by about 7am. The upper decks of the Amsterdam provided nice views of the iconic Harbour Bridge as shown on the right.



The old buildings of The Rocks section of Sydney, next to the passenger



terminal, were also clearly visible, as shown on the left.

Many of the passengers had family and friends on the shore who had come down to meet the ship today. In

this photo on the right are three ladies on the balcony of the passenger terminal who were waving American flags and eagerly looking to see the people they had come to meet.



The sky was a bit overcast but the temperature was in the high 60s and it was a perfect day for exploring this part of Australia. We had signed up for the Cruise Critic tour organized by Elisabeth and Werner (WANDERVOGEL) with Oz Trails for a base cost of \$46 USD per person plus \$25 Australian (\$26 USD) per person for the optional funicular and rain forest trek at Scenic World. We took the optional funicular and rain forest walk so we paid a total of \$72 USD per person. We left



the ship as a group and walked to the head of Circular Quay where our bus was waiting for us. We were on our way by about 8am, right on schedule.

Our driver and guide from Oz Trails turned out to be a real winner. He had a great Australian accent and used the audio system on the bus to keep us clued in on the passing scene, Australian history and his opinion about some of the things we were to see today. His last name was Michael. He humorously described painful grade school days when he was known as “Mickey Mouse” by his schoolmates. Fortunately in his teen years he graduated to being simply called “Mick” which he preferred. Here is Mick in the red shorts at our first stop at the Year 2000 Olympic Park that is maintained by Sydney as a place for large public events and magnet for tourists.



On the left is the Australian – New Zealand (ANZ) Stadium, and a seriously overfed tourist.

Mick pointed out a dominant feature of the plaza known as the Volunteer Forest made up of tall shiny steel poles as shown below.



Here on the right, Mick is pointing out the plaques that were on each of the poles and contained the engraved names of every volunteer that helped



with the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. The names are arranged alphabetically so we were able to find that two people with our name of “Stansfield” had worked on the Olympic effort, as shown on the left.

We boarded the bus and were exiting

the Olympic Park when we saw a banner advertising Dolly Parton and her tour show that was being performed in the Sydney Olympic Park venue during November. As loyal fans of this East Tennessee singing star and philanthropist we scrambled to get the picture on the right before it disappeared from view.





As we passed through different neighborhoods we asked Mick about the approximate cost of housing around Sydney. As with real estate everywhere the price would vary greatly depending on location. Taking this house shown on the right as an example, within easy commuting distance to Sydney it might cost \$500,000 Australian (\$525,000 USD). Far out in the country, like in the Blue Mountains where we were



going the same house might sell for about \$200,000 Australian (\$210,000 USD). This is the same relationship we see in the United States but overall housing prices seem significantly higher in this area than in East Tennessee.

After about an hour's drive Mike took a sideroad to a place called Flat Rock. He had been building up our expectations about the place and we were ready to see it. However, when we got there the road was choked with busses from other tour groups and mobs of people were milling about. Mike quickly changed our plans and turning the bus around we headed for another site that had been planned for later. He explained that Flat Rock was best enjoyed without a lot of people wandering around so we would get ahead of the tour busses coming out of Sydney by going now to Scenic World where we would view the Jamison Valley and a rain forest in the Blue Mountains.

We arrived at Scenic World which has a logo displaying the "Three Sisters" rock formation, as shown on the right. We would view the Three Sisters later on our tour. Mike gave us tickets to take a scenic ride on a cable car across the upper part of Jamison Valley. The cable car ride was to be followed by a ride on a finicular down an almost vertical slope into the rain forest below where we would take a walk.



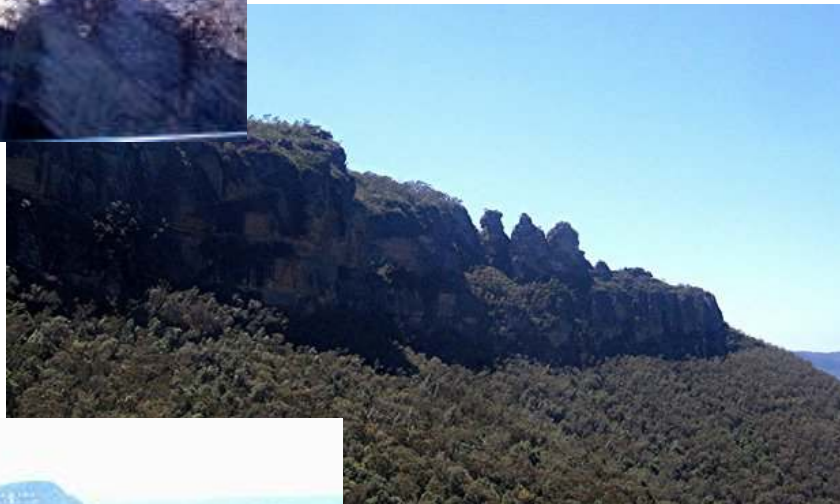
Thanks to Mick's decision to forge ahead of the other tour buses there were few other people in line to take the cable car. Keeping any fear of heights under wraps we boarded the roomy cable car.

Here are a few scenes from the pictures we took of the scenes from the cable car and area around the top of Jamison Valley.



A creek falls from the edge of the cliff into the valley below.

The iconic Three Sisters rock formation on the edge of the valley wall.



Sulfur crested cockatoos enjoying lunch and the view.





The Scenic World park has a cable operated funicular that hauls passengers up and down the nearly vertical sides of the Valley. Part of the thrill of visiting the place is the ride on the funicular so we all joined in, as shown on the right. We were carried in an open air car with a steel screen top. The seats were canted at a steep angle so when we were descending it was not difficult to stay seated.



We got out of the funicular cars at the bottom of the cliff wall and started our walk through the rain forest with Mick providing a running commentary about the rain forest and individual features we were seeing.

The streams in the rain forest are fed by springs which flow year around. Rain falling on the land above flows along an impenetrable layer of rock until it reaches the face of the valley wall and then it cascades down into the forest.

Most of the valley floor is rather dry and covered with eucalyptus trees but the valley walls and general topography creates micro-climates that support small enclaves of rain forests like the one we were in.



For many years a coal mine was operated on this site removing coal from a seam deep within the wall of the valley. The picture on the left shows some remains of the entrance to one of the mines.



The tree ferns were magnificent and were a significant portion of the plant life population.





Much of the path through the rain forest was on an elevated wooden walkway. The easy stroll through this marvelous forest was a beautiful experience. These photos try to capture the moment.



After about 45 minutes of walking the boardwalk through the rain

forest we returned to the funicular. We were drawn back up out of the valley by the same car that brought us in.



From Scenic World and Jamison Valley we drove about 15 minutes to the town of Leura. We chose a deli type restaurant recommended by Mick and had lunch with Dan and Barbara as shown in the picture on the right.



After lunch we drove about 30 minutes to Govett's Leap which was a cliff site on Grose Valley with a water fall called Bridal Veil Falls, shown below.



By climbing down some stairs we were able to get a couple different views of the delicate falls.



Mick pointed out some details of the tree foliage on the valley floor that indicated small patches of rain forest existed on the floor of Grose Valley, just like in Jamison Valley where we had just visited. Unfortunately, our pictures don't show that detail.

From Grovett's Leap we drove about 30 minutes to the Flat Rock site that had been overrun with fellow tourists this morning. Now the place was empty and we had it to ourselves.

Mick triumphantly led us out onto a solid fairly flat sandstone outcropping on the edge of a several hundred foot high cliff. Down at the



bottom of the cliff we could see a couple wrecked cars as shown on the left. Mick said the wrecks were stolen cars and disposed of by running them over the cliff.

Mick briefly pointed out the beauty of the surrounding plateau and deep valley. Then the real reason for the mischievous grin on his face became apparent. He proposed that those of us with sufficient courage pose on the edge of the cliff so

he could take a picture of us with our cameras. After initial hesitation there was acceptance of the idea that grew into enthusiastic participation after a few of us survived the exercise.

Several people gingerly approached the edge and sat with legs dangling into space as Mick took a picture. With Barbara in a near apoplectic state Orlin's turn came and the picture we got is shown on the right.





This Australian version of an IQ test was not over. Mick next showed us another venue on flat rock that could be used to stage an interesting photo. There was a place at the edge of the cliff where there was a ledge a couple feet down from the top edge of the cliff, as shown in this photo on the right.

Mick's idea was to have people with sufficiently low IQ crouch down on the lower ledge and act like they were



barely hanging on to the edge of the cliff above. There were several takers who all survived. Orlin's picture is shown on the left. The effect could probably be improved with a little rehearsal time but we had to move on. Mick seemed reasonably happy with our efforts.

Our friend, Barbara, appeared happy to just observe these silly antics and take in the beauty of the view.



Next Mick gave us a lesson on how the Aborigines made some of the paint they used to mark their bodies. He found a patch of reddish rock that he called ocher. He said it was high in iron oxide which gave it the red color. Using a stone he rubbed the ocher to produce a fine powder that he moistened with his saliva. He then smeared the red mud on the back of his hand to illustrate how the Aborigines marked their bodies. The patch of reddish rock and the marks on the back of Mick's left hand are shown in the picture above. In all of his discussion Mick always showed a deep respect for Aboriginal ways.



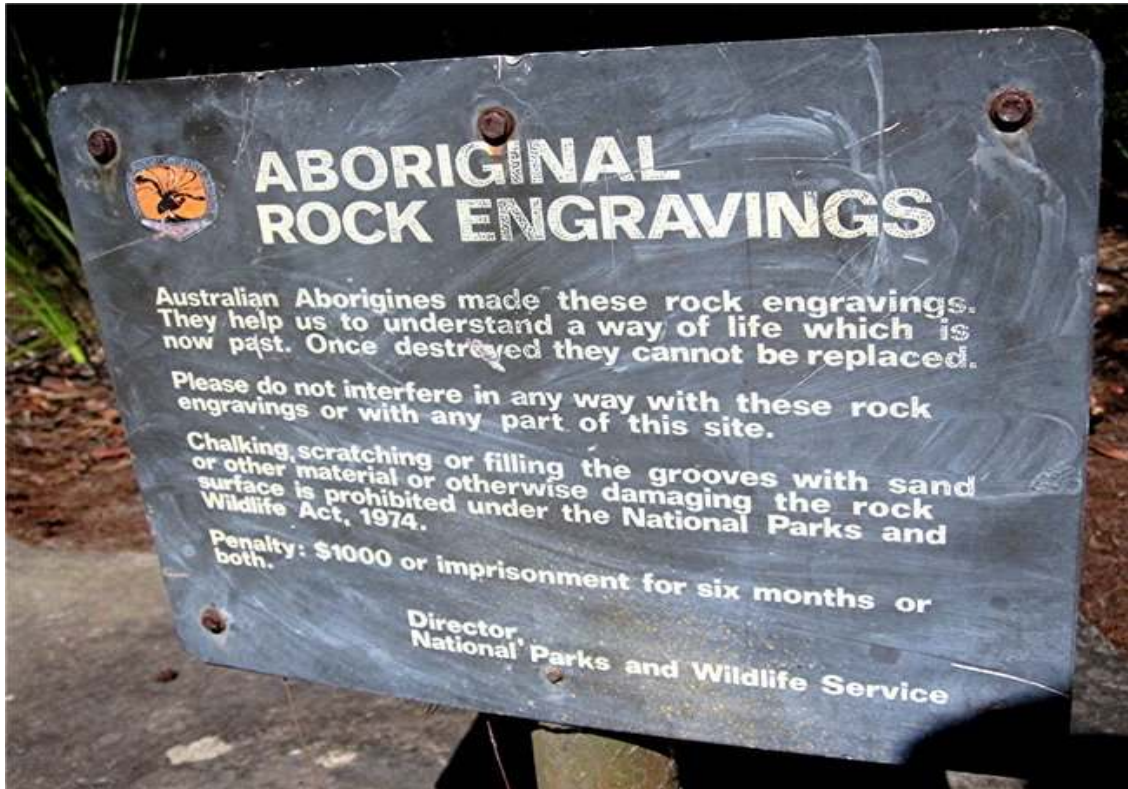
The next event on our agenda was to go to the site of some Aboriginal rock engraving. From Flat Rock we drove about 15 minutes to a residential section of a little town where we pulled into a small parking area. We walked a short distance to a sandstone rock outcropping. Mick brought a bottle filled with water and he poured the water into grooves that had been chiseled into the surface of the rock. The water made the grooves in the rock dark so they could be seen more easily. Mick finished pouring the water and the image of a kangaroo emerged from what had appeared to be a featureless slab of sandstone, as shown on the right.



Mick had formed a friendship with an Aboriginal tribal elder who told him the purpose and meaning of a rock carving like this. He said the carving was part of a system of directional road signs used by early aborigines to help travelers find their way. The tail pointed in the direction that that rock carvers had come and the head pointed in the direction they traveled away from this site. The people doing the carving apparently felt that the availability of food and water might be better in those directions and there may be fewer physical obstructions. Other travelers finding this carving might find the going easier if they took the same route in their journey. According to Mick there was a code of honor among Aborigines that forbid making these carvings in a frivolous way. They could only be made with tribal approval.



A nearby sign indicated that this rock engraving site was under the protection of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.



It felt like a real privilege to have seen this ancient evidence of human effort to communicate for the betterment of fellow people. It was not fenced in or otherwise protected, except for the sign shown above. The small parking lot in a residential area was the only indication that something worth looking at could be found here.

From the rock engraving we drove about an hour to the ferry boat landing on the Parramatta River near the Year 2000 Olympic Park where we had stopped this morning.

The tickets for the ferry were included in the tour price. Oz Trails had really delivered a tour that we would remember for the beauty of the sites we visited and the background information that Mick provided. We would recommend Oz Trails for anyone considering a tour in this area. At this point we said goodbye to Mick, and thanked him for a most interesting tour. We then boarded a ferry boat shown in the picture on the right.



The ferry boat took us down the river to Sydney Harbour. Along the way we saw other ferry boats like the one shown on the right. There were also some beautiful panoramic views of Sydney Harbor we had not seen from the area around Circular Quay where the Amsterdam was docked..



After about an hour's cruise we were dropped off at Circular Quay next to where the Amsterdam was docked. We walked to the ship and took the obligatory picture of the Sydney Opera House, as shown on the right.



The ferry boat ride completed the last event on our tour description that Elisabeth had given us. We really appreciated the work that Elisabeth and Werner (WANDERVOGEL) had put in to making the arrangements, collecting the money and shepherding us through the tour. We owe a debt of gratitude to this Cruise Critic couple and the others who have put out the effort to make these tours happen for our cruising enjoyment.



We boarded the Amsterdam in time for dinner in the Lido Restaurant. After dinner we decided to sample a bit more of what Sydney had to offer so we left the ship and walked around Circular Quay towards the Opera House. By this time it was getting dark and the night life of Sydney had started. The sidewalk restaurants and bars along the quay were packed with people enjoying the warm evening and lights of the city and the harbor. The lights of the Amsterdam and the surrounding city were beautiful to see, as shown in the picture below.



After walking around the opera house we made it back to the ship and turned in for the night. Tomorrow we have another day in Sydney and we are looking forward to just hiking around town and visiting some of the places we have been before.