

I've just returned from a wonderful gathering in Brisbane, Australia organised by Penny French and her willing band of members from the Southeast Queensland group. I was fortunate in having completed the gathering pretour to Longreach the week before the gathering thereby getting to know some of the members before the gathering started.

The official gathering was attended by 22 women and one very brave man who was accompanying a Canadian member. Members came from Germany, Switzerland, Japan, USA, UK, Finland, Canada and four other states of Australia.

The first meeting of our group was at the South Brisbane railway station where we were put on the train to Surfers Paradise to be welcomed by the Gold Coast 5W group. Our first taste of the Gold Coast was a boat trip along the canals with lunch provided and a specially prepared BBQ dinner in the evening on the pool deck of our hotel. Unfortunately, despite all their preparations for a remarkable visit, the weather was not kind to us and it rained the next day when we headed out for a bus tour to Mt Tamborine. This didn't prevent us from enjoying our lunch at Hinze Dam or the Devonshire teas at the Dancing Café, but luck was with us when

we had a slight incident when our bus driver lost control going down a hill on the slippery road and we aquaplaned into a road sign. What could have been a distressing event was quickly turned into one of the highlights of the day when Frank Hughes, a nearby resident, came to our rescue, providing a warm fire inside his home and making 33 cups of tea and coffee for the wet travellers.

The next day we departed on the 'Lady Brisbane' for a pleasant boat trip up the coast sans luggage which was kindly ferried by car to our Brisbane accommodation by local members. A big thank you ladies. On Sunday we were 'welcomed to Country' by a troupe of Aboriginal dancers and a didgeridoo player, adorned in traditional clothing and paint who explained Aboriginal law and culture and then taken on a tour of the Botanical Gardens and buildings by the Brisbane Greeters.

The Carnival of Flowers was our next organised coach trip and we enjoyed the kaleidoscope of colour provided by the gardens of Toowoomba. Of particular beauty were the gardens at Spring Bluff station, Queens Park and the Japanese Garden at xxxx.

Tuesday was a free day so some of us took advantage of Carmel Harris' offer of tickets to see the musical extravaganza 'Strictly Ballroom'. This did not disappoint. In the evening we caught the city cat to the Merthyr Bowls club for a BBQ on the bay.

On Wednesday, the Sunshine Coast ladies organised a bus trip north to Eumundi Markets and the beautiful beaches of Noosa and Mooloolaba where afternoon tea was provided above the 'Loo with a View', ie., on the deck over the beach toilets. As this also happened to be my birthday, I was very pleasantly surprised when the ladies appeared with a birthday cake and then sang Happy Birthday to me.

Our next big outing was to the Lone Pine koala sanctuary where we had our photos taken with a koala and met other native inhabitants such as snakes, wombats, kangaroos, emus and dingos. That evening we were bused back to the Gold Coast to watch the Australian Outback Spectacular. Donned with a western style hat, we were fed and watered while being entertained with typical outback stories and activities such as bareback riding, cattle catching, and hearing stories of brumbies, our famous Red Dog, snowy river legends and ghosts all to a large movie backdrop and songs by Christine Anu.

Saturday's highlight was Riverfire, a spectacular fireworks display on the Brisbane River. However, this was not an ordinary fireworks display as we were ushered onto a paddlesteamer and taken to a vantage point on the river where we had a fantastic view of pass overs by fighter jets and helicopters while indulging in a seemingly never ending stream of food and drink.

Our final day saw the coming together of gatherers and local members when over 70 people attended a luncheon at the Women's College at The University of Queensland organised by member Marion Jones. Here we made our farewells and wished those members who were continuing on to the post tour to Cairns a very safe and enjoyable trip.

As well as the gathering organisers, I would also like to thank the local members who hosted us before and after the gathering. We are very grateful for the way you welcomed us into your homes and ferried us to and from the train stations and airport. A big thank you also to the drivers who picked up our luggage from the Gold Coast and dropped it at our hotel in Brisbane while we enjoyed the boat trip along the Queensland coast.

*Jenny (Perth)*