

Australia

A Year Of Backpacking

Julie Farmer

1994 to 1995

If you have a
story or memory
you want to
record you need
to call

**MYPA on
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Backpackers Hostel

Glebe, Sydney, Australia

My home for almost 3 months in 1994.



When I arrived in Australia, I found a backpackers hotel in the suburb of Glebe, Sydney, called Pat's Place. The owner, Pat, was an ex-pat. I stayed for a few days in the main hostel. However, one bed in the room was infested with some kind of bed bugs. Pat had to disinfect the entire room, so she moved me to a second house she had just purchased. The lady who had owned the house, was still living in it with her daughter so I ended up sleeping in was the old garage/car port. I landed on my feet here as the old lady took pity on me and insisted on providing me with a hot meal when I returned from work. She didn't think you could work full time and eat a good hot meal. She also did my washing.

I needed to work in Sydney so went to the local job centre, handed in my CV and waited until someone called for the services I offered. I also joined a few temp agencies. The first job I found was at an advertising agency as a receptionist, and then with Mr Caddison, whose claim to fame was that he was the person who first imported Tipex (White-Out) to Australia. He hated modern technology and refused to have a computer in his office. The most modern item in the office was a calculator.

My Birthday

Glebe, Sydney, Australia

A very quite affair.



My birthday was a quiet affair. Just me and one other. However, you cannot have a birthday without cake. This year I had a Mississippi Mud Pie cheesecake. The lady of the house also made a pasta dinner. I couldn't eat the dinner. The lady's daughter would cook once a week and fill the food with garlic. The only problem is, I am allergic to garlic so it would make me ill. No matter how many times I told her, she added more and more.

My bed was the only place available to sit, so it became my sofa, my bed and dining table. As it was the old garage, there were always cockroaches scurrying along the floor. Horrible things that just wouldn't die. On a Saturday I would walk two miles to the local supermarket to purchase my food for the week. I would also have lunch out, always Lemon Chicken from the food court. It was a special treat and money was tight. I took £5000 with me for the year and only had the money I worked for. I also purchase several Cherry Ripe's, an Australian version of a Bounty Bar with cherries. Still one of the best chocolate bars going.

The Car I Bought

Leaving Glebe, Sydney, Australia

Kingswood Holden



I stayed in Sydney for 3 months before travelling around the rest of Australia. I purchased a Kingswood Holden, an Australian made car. The car was ready to leave Sydney at 5am. I left early as I was nervous driving a stick shift car, as I had never driven one before. In addition, I didn't know the roads around the city. The car's air conditioning broke 3 minutes into the drive and got stuck on the cold setting. My feet froze.

It wasn't until three hours later that I found the inlet vent and closed it. The car was fantastic. By the time I sold it; it was eating 5 litres of oil a week. I sold the car at a backpackers car sale lot, a local multi-storey car park. I sold it to two Israelis, for \$200 Australian dollars more than I bought it for. You can't see it from the picture, but it also had curtains to stop the heat and keep the car cool.

Before leaving Sydney I was given advice to carry water with me wherever I went, so in the back of the car was 80 gallons of water. I never used it.

My New Home

Becoming a Nomad

The car came with a free tent!



After leaving Glebe, I had to decide where I should sleep at night. There were two viable options available for me. The first option was to move from backpacker hostel to hostel or camp. I am such a cheapskate and the tent came free with the car. I opted to sleep under the stars. In addition, most of the campsites in Australia at the time were free. In addition, I could use the local Service Men's Clubs to eat a hot meal and shower. The rules of the Service Men's club were that you had to live over 10 kilometres away (check) or have a family from the armed forces (check). Not only that, the views for camping were so much better than hostels.

I had a sleeping bag from the UK and used that in the tent. My mattress was a three foot wide piece of foam that would get rolled up every day and tied to the roof of the car. The car got noticed around the travelling circuit because of that roll. Lorries would beep their horns and wave, which was comforting strangely.

One of the better sides of camping was that I met more locals on their holidays and got tips on where to visit and what to do. I would also get invites into peoples houses to use their facilities and wash my clothes. Australians are so friendly.

Eating Out

My Barbeque Days

I like Steak – Who knew!



Eating was one issue I had to overcome quickly. I didn't want to eat in fast-food restaurants all the time. I wanted some kind of healthy eating. The local supermarkets were always open, and I had the car to store some foods. However, I couldn't store everything. I bought an esker (cold box) to put some foods in. The obvious being milk. Coffee being one of the most important drinks, after waking up. Most of the time I had a kettle available, but on the odd occasion I had to make a fire, fetch water from a river and boil that for coffee.

One of the strange eating events that occurred during my trip was that I discovered I liked steak. Before Australia, I didn't eat steak, but it was so cheap and easy to cook on the free barbeques at the campsite it became a staple food. Fruit was free or cheap and I ate Water Melon in half's and not slices.

If I wasn't cooking at the campsite, I would go to the local pasta restaurant and buy a ticket for the all you could eat buffet. It became a habit to eat at the buffet every two or three days. I would eat so much that I would waddle out. That would keep me going for a few days. It was only about \$12.00.

Coffs Harbour, NSW

Georges Gold Mine 1928

Outside the Dunny and pure magic



This old mine shaft created one of the best memories I have ever had. I was sleeping in the tent and at about 5.30 am the sun hit the tent. It got so hot that I had to get out and made my morning coffee. This meant walking down to the fresh river and collecting a jug of water. I then had to make a wood fire with material lying around. Boiling the water seemed to take ages. The water was eventually hot enough to make coffee.

The birds were just starting to wake up and sing. I took this opportunity to walk into the rain forest with my coffee. As I was walking, I found a small wooden bench over a little bridge with a stream running under it. It was magical. To add to this, a duckbill platypus was busy fixing his house, adding twigs and bits of rubble, eating and playing in the water. I had to stay still as he had not noticed me. I was there for almost 15 minutes. He then noticed me. I just smiled at him and he looked at me. Nothing else. We made eye contact for about 10 seconds. Not long, but it felt like an eternity. He then swam off. I finished my coffee and then walked back to the tent and made another coffee.

It has to be one of my best memories of my trip to Australia. True natural magic.

Uluru, Aire Rock

My near escape with a gang of thieves

And my quick get away or not!



When I went to Uluru, Aires Rock I was given the advice of not stopping for anyone in the road even if they looked like they needed it. There were groups of men who would wait for tourists to slow down and wait for the tourist to offer support and then rob them of all their possessions, even their car.

With this advice in mind, I was leaving Uluru and ended up being flagged down by a chap standing on the side of the road on his own. Being wary, I secured the car doors, and the windows were closed. He came to the passenger's side of the car and bent down to talk. A few seconds later there were four other men that seemed to appear from nowhere surrounding the car.

I panicked and put my foot on the accelerator to escape what could have been a nightmare situation. The Kingswood Holden had a bit of a problem. Every now and again it would get stuck in first gear. To release it, I would have to rock the car from side to side by standing on the driver's rim and jump up and down. As luck would have it, the gear stuck. So, here I was, escaping what could have been a very dangerous situation at 5 miles an hour. The men just stood there laughing at me. Got to love that car!

The Long Windy Road

Waiting for the empty space of the road

The roads are so busy



Before leaving the UK, I was told that the outback was a lonely place and it could be hours before I met another car on the road. In Glebe this was also the case. I took loads of water, food and medical equipment just in case the car broke down. The car always had a full tank of petrol and whenever I passed a petrol station, I would fill up.

The Truth

I never went over 5 miles without seeing another car, lorry or someone on the road. To take the above picture, I had to wait for 30 minutes so I could have it free of cars and people.

The Sign

The sign reads no fuel for 370 miles. For someone from the UK, this is a very scary sign. I filled a fuel can full of petrol and had to put it in the car and hide it from the sun to keep it cool and safe. Just in case I needed it.

The Devils Marbles

Rocks from the Devil himself

Nature is fantastic



Nature is awesome, driving around we came across the Devils Marbles. Just look how fantastic this is. How on earth does this happen!

To get to these rocks I had to go off the main road and on a dirt road. There were more pot holes and bumps than I expected. I was worried that the suspension in the car would break. It took about 40 minutes to get there. I was there for about 10 minutes and then got back in the car for the drive back. It was so hot I just couldn't stay out any longer. This was on the way to Uluru.



Keeping Cool

Dressing for all occasions

Glasses, hats and dungarees



When I left the UK, I filled an 80 litre rucksack with clothes, convinced I didn't have enough. When I was leaving Sydney, I then purchased a pair of purple dungarees. I then spent the rest of the trip (8 months) living in those dungarees and one dress. I had about three or four t-shirts, three pairs of pants, socks and my walking boots.



In fact, I packed all of my clothes in a plastic shopping bag and lived out of that. I stored the rucksack at the back of the car and opened when the trip was over.

Uluru and Flies

I have been up, in and around this rock

The Middle of nowhere



Uluru was underwhelming. I know everyone marvelled at the change of colours they could see. The beautiful sunsets and how spiritual they felt. To be honest, it was a rock in the middle of nowhere and although I was standing next to someone who stated it was the best sunset they had ever seen; I didn't think so. It was a long day, awake at 3am to see the sunrise and a day walking around and up the rock.

My memory is of flies. As soon as you got out of the car, the flies swarmed. I put a net over my head as they were driving me mad. As a result, I got back in the car as soon as I could.

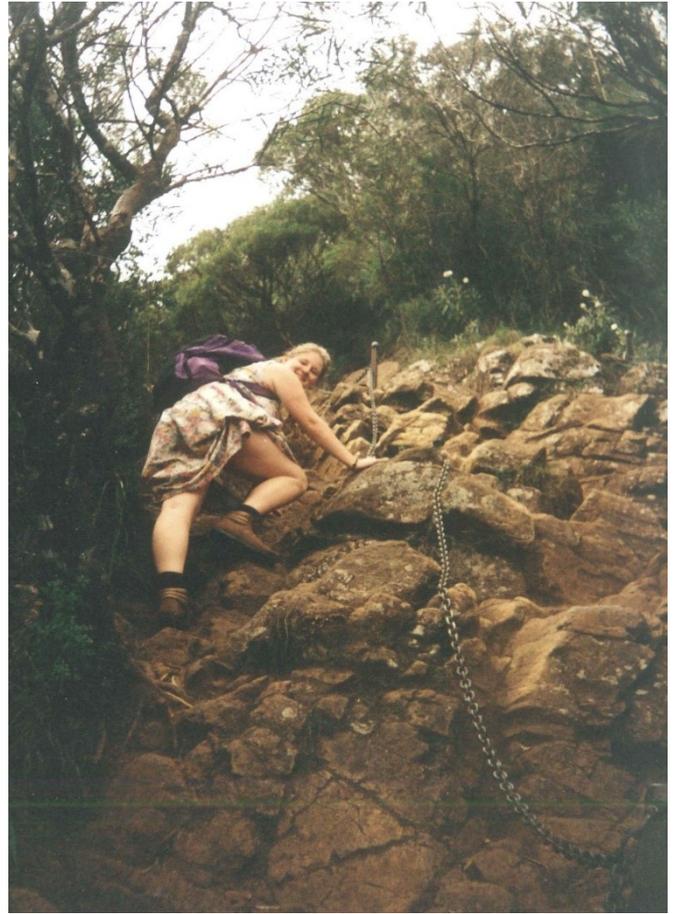


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Other photos

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