

Friendship Force Members can travel with clubs other than their own. For example, Richard & Joanne went to Western Australia with the Fort Worth, Texas Club in 2014. Below are descriptions of three of the trip.

Richard and Joanne Collins – Oct 18 – Albany

We woke to a chilly and what promised to be a drizzly day for our Walpole WOW ECO Cruise. Maggie Scott, our host, accompanied us as she had heard the cruise was memorable. It was!

The rain held off until late afternoon and the fun began with the life vest demonstration and never let up. Before we boarded our boat we disinfected our shoes using a cleaning station designed to prevent the spread of Phytophthora Dieback, a plant disease that kills many of Western Australia's native plants.

What do Tolstoy, the Moses Line, Snake Island and marsupial reproductive physiology have in common? The highly energetic and entertaining Gazza (Gary) Muir, our boat captain, tour guide and history buff. Gary was born into the pioneering Muir family in the Walpole area. Gary wears no shoes; neither did his grandfather who was quoted as saying "for those who wear shoes, the world is made of socks."

Tolstoy? Gary rattled tongue twisting Russian names off at a dizzying pace as he linked Tolstoy to papers of one Frank Thompson. The papers were found in a Walpole boat shed a few years ago. Frank who was a manager of Tolstoy translations in England, if I got this right, landed in Walpole, the belly button of the world, to escape the long reach of the czar. Gary's grandfather had plucked Frank and his family off a sandbar in Walpole Inlet. The story twists and turns with our Gary comically demonstrating his arrest when he showed up in Russia to deliver the papers to a Russian historian.

Marsupial reproductive physiology – I won't go into details here. Let's just say Gary used a bucket, squirt bottle and snorkels to explain in an unbelievably animated and funny way the unique bifurcated physiology.

Following our entertaining boat ride, we stopped for a picnic lunch provided by our hosts before walking in the tree tops. That's right we walked in tree tops in the *Valley of the Giants*. The giants are Red Tingle trees some of which are four hundred years old and over forty meters high. I will let our photos tell the story.



In the giant Tingle Tree

<https://www.dwg.org.au/what-is-phytophthora-dieback>

http://www.wowwilderness.com.au/WOW/WOW_History.html

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marsupial>

<http://www.australia.com/explore/states/wa/wa-valley-of-the-giants.aspx>

Richard and Joanne Collins – Oct 25 – Perth

Everlasting Love! The Swan Bells hail from London's St. Martin-in-the-Fields, a gift to Perth, that now hang in Perth's Bell Tower. We spread out the in Bell Ringer Chamber, each of of under a heavy rope connected to an unseen bell above, as bell ringer Laura Ivey demonstrated bell ringing technique. Then our turn came. We rang with a cacophony of enthusiasm learning that bell ringing can be fun but hard work too. Petite Laura certainly gets her exercise as she has rung the heavy bells for 4000 days in the last 14 years. Wow!

After giving the bells a good workout, we climbed to the belfry for a look at the bells. There were no bats. The bells are separated from the viewing area by glass walls so we couldn't try to climb out onto them. The bells, all really big, hang upside down when not ringing, something I would not have guessed.

While Richard proceeded to the observation deck for a views of the city, Joanne returned to ground level to purchase a lovelock. Lovelocking, originating in China, has spread around the world. Of course we had to be love locked. Joanne had our names engraved on a lock that we secured to a chain that surrounds the tower. Lock profits, of course, support the Bell Tower so we can think of lovelocking as a donation.

Note - Our Australian host told us that they had never had a chance to ring the bells – this was special just for Friendship Force. On another day, we met the mayor at a reception and planted a Friendship Force tree along the Swan River See http://saileagleswings.blogspot.com/2014_10_01_archive.html

Exiting the Bell Tower, we boarded a ferry for a ride down the Swan River to Freemantle, Perth's port city. After watching the Dockers Cannon fire at exactly at 1 PM, we wandered about the tourists' galleries where Joanne purchased an Aboriginal painting before consuming Fish & Chips at Cicerellos Restaurant.

One could spend a day at the Shipwreck Museum but we had only an

hour before our hosts, Colin & Linda Allen, drove us to the Welcome Dinner with homemade lasagnas and salads prepared by Perth Friendship Force members. After dinner we enjoyed a wonderful night's rest in our host's guest bedroom.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swan_Bells

<http://www.thebelltower.com.au/content/lovelocks/>

<http://museum.wa.gov.au/museums/shipwrecks>

<http://www.cicerellos.com.au/>



Bells



Ringling Bells

Richard and Joanne Collins – Nov. 2 – to Uluru Bus Trip Hike Sunset

Up before sunrise and aboard a big AATKings touring bus, we rolled around Alice Springs picking up tourists from various hotels, resorts and hostels before passing through the gap in the McDonald Mountains unto the Stuart Highway. This is a two lane road that seems to go on almost forever through the sparsely vegetated and semi- arid outback.

I thought we might see big kangaroos out here but actually the land cannot support much in the way of life. For example, each Aborigine who wandered about the outback required about 77 sq miles just to survive. However, large cattle stations do tap ample drinking water lying deep underground. Anyway the bus rolled on and on stopping at a few roadhouses along the way. One offered camel rides; a number of the Friendship Force crew mounted up. Another offered frozen kangaroo tail. So I suppose there must be some kangaroos around somewhere.

I was awake for the big event, turning at the intersection of the Stuart and Lasseter Highways. Along the latter highway, we stopped at a turnout across the road from a dune of fine grained red sand. On the other side of the dune a white salt flat stretched out that we were told remains mushy under its hard packed surface. Looking the other way, we could see that the road does indeed go on forever. A total of about 300 rolling bus miles delivered us from Alice Springs in the middle of nowhere to the Ayers Rock Pioneer Lodge, also in the middle of nowhere. The outback is that big, actually much bigger.

After checking into the lodge, Joanne and I woofed down a hamburger each for lunch. Another big AATKings bus complete with tour guide transported us to the Kata Tjuta viewing spot for photos before we hiked Kata Tjuta's Walpa Gorge Walk, a 2.6km stroll up close to the red rock. We ended the day's tour with a sunset viewing of the big rock, Uluru. I snapped a bunch of pictures as the sun went down and the light faded. Time for a shower and bed - we have an early 4 AM wake-up call as we need to be back on the bus at 4:45 AM for the sunrise viewing of Uluru followed by more touring and a long bus ride back to Alice Springs.

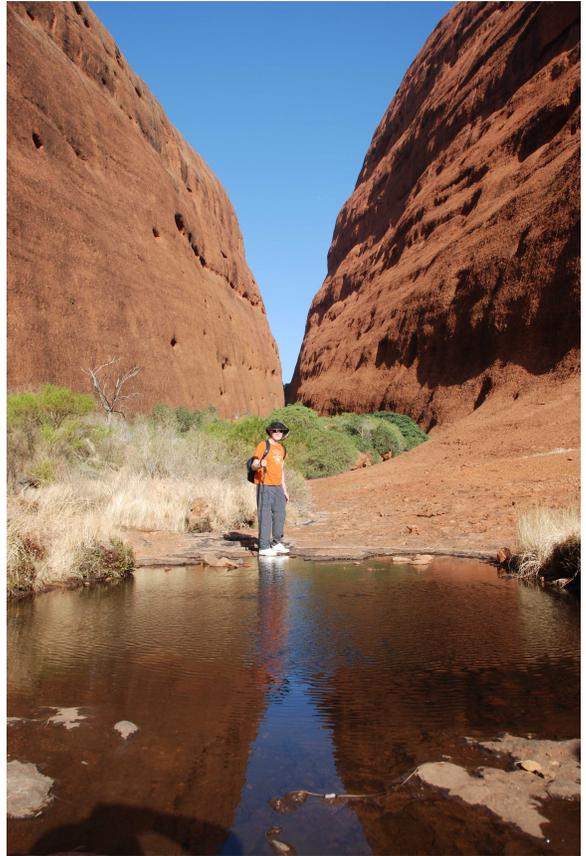
<http://www.parksaustralia.gov.au/uluru/>

<http://uluru-australia.com/about-ayers-rock/where-is-ayers-rock/>

<http://uluru-australia.com/ayers-rock-tours-experiences/walks-in-kata-tjuta/>



Sunset at Uluru



Walpa Gorge