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Tripreport E.W.Dijkstra, Australia, 16 February 1977 - 21 March 1977.

The trip to "downunder" was terrible. Still remembering my forced stay
in the International Departure Hall of New Delhi --with the cockroaches on the
carpet-- I refused to fly again via the Eastern Hemisphere and had arranged
my itinery via Los Angeles. The IATA tariff rules --imposed by QUANTAS, the
Australian airline company-- are such that you may have one stopover during the
whole trip. Having the choice between arriving in Australia or returning home
as a bodily and nervous wreck, I had chosen the first.

I had planned the trip as carefully as possible. Instead of leaving
Nuenen early on the morning of the Thursday on which I crossed the Atlantic,
I flew to London on the previous evening. I had a hotel reservation quite
close to Heathrow Airport, and the idea was that I would start from there
on the creat crossing as fresh as a daisy. Secondly I had selected a British
Airways flight with only two hours to catch my connection in Los Angeles. The
idea was that the BA flight would probably late: in that case a night of
--welcome!-- delay in LA would be forced upon me, and then I would not have
to pay the additional $600,-- (!) , otherwise required for a second stopover.

But my cunning arrangement did not work at all: the hotel in London --
the Centre Airport Hotel, Bath Road, Longford, avoid it!!-- was terrible,
so terrible that I hardly slept at all, and, although we had some delay when
leaving from Heathrow, the BA-plane made up for it and arrived in LA dead on
time! I caught my connection, and --what was worse-- from LA to Honolulu
the PANAM Jumbo was filled to the brim with teenagers from an American high-
school. (They applauded during take-off, etc....) Perfect as the BA flight
had been, so terrible was the PANAM flight: the Boeing 747 suffered from poor
shockabsorbers, and that made the take-offs bad and the landings worse. With
intermediate stops in Honolulu and Pago-Pago I had plenty of opportunity to
observe the phenomenon. After Honolulu I slept a little, but when the Good
Lord created the Talkative Airline Passenger, he made one of his worst mis-
takes.

I arrived in Sydney on Saturday morning, more dead than alive and very
thirsty. I was collected by three gentlemen from the University of New South
Wales, and they were very considerate hosts. They took me to the other ter-
minal, carried my luggage, gave me a few glasses of beer and saw me off at
the gate, where I got on the plane to Canberra.

Thinking it over I can still get very cross with QUANTAS. If you were
allowed a second stopover, you would not cost the airline companies a single
passengermile more, but for no valid reason the trip is just made much more
exhausting than necessary. I know that, when very tired, there is a much
greater probability that I have trouble with my eyesight than otherwise. I
was therefore very grateful that in Sydney others were willing to carry my
suitcase, but in spite of their good care, during that first week in Canberra,
my eyes worried me twice, once even much longer than at previous occasions.
I had plenty reason for cursing QUANTAS.

Four days before my return home I had the return flight confirmed, but
this nervous traveller knew that there was something wrong. Because the con-
firmations had been made by telephone, I had no proof that they had been con-
firmed, and the day before my departure I went the PANAM office in Canberra
and had the girl behind the counter make a mark on my ticket, stating that my
flight had been duly confirmed.

The next day, as soon as I was shown my place --45 D-- I was called to the front of the plane via the loudspeakers. I undid my safety belt, went forward and was asked to show my boarding pass. Shortly after I had returned to my seat, someone else came, and I had to show my boarding pass again. After take off I slept a little and forgot the incident. In Pago-Pago I left the plane to stretch my legs. But when I returned, the seats 45D/E were occupied by an otherwise nice couple. A stewardess promised to sort this out, but while she was still sorting out, more and more passengers came on board and the plane became absolutely full. With apologies from the company I was given a --very uncomfortable-- chair in the lounge on the second floor, above the first class cabin. In Honolulu I had to go through Immigration and Customs; when I returned I was given seat 45A and I had some sleep. In Los Angeles I had a pleasant stopover of 28 hours. With the direct flight of LUFTHANSA I flew back to Amsterdam in a Boeing 707, nearly full. A planeload of Germans is a bit much. Ria had come with the car to Schiphol to collect me: at a quarter past five I was back in her arms, at a quarter to eight we were home and I went to sleep at nine o'clock for the next twelve hours. When I woke up the next morning, I realized that in Australia it was six o'clock in the evening and in Los Angeles midnight.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

My Australian hosts had organized my visit very carefully and with much consideration. For four weeks my official status was Visiting Fellow of the Australian National University, which had paid the travel expenses. At the second week I started on a lecture tour past the Universities and local branches of the Australian Computer Society at Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney "to earn my living".

I arrived on Saturday 19th of February, was given a few peaceful days for adjustment and lectured on Thursday 24th and Friday 25th at ANU. (Both days I was the last speaker at a seminar with about 250 participants.) On the evening of Monday 28th I left for Adelaide, where I lectured at the University on Tuesday afternoon and for the ACS that evening. On Wednesday morning I left for Melbourne, where I performed at the University that afternoon and for the ACS on the evening of the next day. On Friday afternoon there was a party in my honour at Peter Poole's house, the weekend I stayed with a Dutch friend --and his relatives-- near Melbourne. On the morning of Monday the 7th of March I flew to Sydney, where I lectured at the University of Sydney; the next day I was at the University of New South Wales during morning and afternoon, that evening I addressed the branch of the ACS and on Wednesday morning 9th of March I returned to Canberra, where I stayed for the last ten days of my visit. In the last week I gave my ninth performance, viz. for the Canberra branch of the ACS. Nine performances of two hours each for an average audience of 200 people seemed enough to make the trip worthwhile.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

Life is not easy for Australian scientists. A look through the papers gives you the impression that Australian spiritual life extends from labour conflicts at the one hand and cricket at the other hand, with very little in between. Listening to the conversations one discovers that there is bushwalking --with snob value-- and that there are horse races --definitely without it-- . There is, of course, much more, but that is definetely much less prominent, under the surface, so to speak.

I found many of my colleagues a little bit sad. They feel very much cut off from the rest of the world, and to a large extent they are. Scientific journals are sent by surface mail, and thus arrive late and irregularly. Worse, of course, is that they are cut off from the old boys network and pick up so little from the grapevine.

They are very much aware of this isolation and try to compensate for it.
They do this in their personal lives. I found in several homes impressive
record collections;   I also looked at the bookshelves, and, again, I was often
impressed. They also try to do this in their organisations. There were many
foreigners and most of the Australian staff members seemed to have been either
in Europe or in the USA or both, either for many visits or for extended periods
of time.   The net result was that at many places --but particularly at ANU--
the whole atmosphere was quite cosmopolitan.

This --and that makes life hard for the Australian scientists-- seems
in sharp contrast to the cultural (?) climate of the Australian government:
a self-centered activity, in which all attention is absorbed by local frus-
trations and mutual mistrust. (In the different states the railway gauges
are different!) My impression of the government and the civil service was
one of a short-range vision, short-range both in time and space. And in view
of the fact that education is always a long-range activity, it is quite under-
standable that most of my colleagues felt very uncomfortable.

Universities all over the world are very much constrained. Private
universities are strongly constrained by the expectations of their students,
universities funded by the government are constrained by the latter. In the
case of the Australian universities, at least the Departments of Computing
Science seem to be held in an iron grip of shortsightedness: the same government
that supports the universities is also a very major employer and, hence, con-
strains them via both ways. A condition for employment of computing people
by the civil service seems to be a training in either COBOL or FORTRAN! That,
of course, is awful. Even if the state in its capacity of funding body leaves
it to the competence of the departments to design their own curriculum, it
jeopardizes that freedom via such employment regulations. Since the moment
that European departments of computer science have concluded that the sooner
those two programming languages will be forgotten,the better, they have ignored
them; in Australia the teaching of PASCAL, however, seems a political issue,
a kind of heresy that should not be permitted. (Thank goodness, also Australia
has its heretics!) I don't remember having felt the tension between "the campus"
and "the real world" so strongly.

I had been looking forward to my talks for the universities, but the
addresses to the branches of the ACS I did not look forward to at all. The
audiences to be expected had been described to me in most uninspiring terms
--it turned out that my spokesmen had been unnecessarily pessimistic--, and
I had been warned that at the ACS I was not expected to use a blackboard.
So I prepared a talk consisting of words only and tried it out at the first
occasion, in Adelaide (with considerable trepidation, because I also stuck
to my habit of speaking without notes). It went down very well, and cowardly
I have used the same talk for the other ACS performances. A cornerstone was
how research in programming methodology has forced upon us the conclusion that
programming should be regarded as a tough engineering discipline with a strong
mathematical flavour. The main theme was, that this conclusion has never been
refuted, but that many refuse to draw it for emotional or political reasons,
reasons that are easy to explain, because the conclusion has many implications
that are unattractive, disappointing or both.

I took a great risk in doing so, because even if I expressed myself in
general terms and talked about the world in general, it could be viewed as
a foreigner meddling in internal affairs, and that is usually not appreciated.
("Misuse of our hospitality" is a common name for the crime.) But I came away
with it, the talks were a great success and evoked a lively discussion that,
on the whole, made excellent sense. (How I came away with it, I still don't

know. Either the Australians welcomed the opportunity to discuss there own
problems in a new, noncontaminated terminology, or my fame and the "weight"
with which I had been announced have acted as a protecting shield; orobably
both.) The only counteraction that I have observed, has been an -anonymous!-
column in Australia's Computer Weekly of Friday, 4th of March 1977, with
all the characteristics of racist slander:

> "I am inclined to view Dijkstra, Wirth and Dahl as intellectual products
> of the Germanic system. Precisely why Tony Hoare associates himself with
> these three is another thing beyond my ken. [...] His [i.e. Dijkstra's]
> efforts have been directed into turning a noble art into a rigid discipline
> on the basis that it would be beter for us all. Being just one of the
> swine watching the dropped pearls I am not sure I like this idea.
> My suspicion that these concepts are the product of an authoritarian
> upbringing is strengthened by the fact that Dahl is Scandinavian, Dijkstra
> Dutch and Wirth Swiss. [...]
> Quite where you go from here I do not know. I had thought of looking
> up Freud but I do not think what he would say would be very refined."

The above does not strike me as very refined either. The Computer Weekly was
a publication that my colleagues at the ANU usually did not see, but on account
of this column they had seen this issue. In my parting speech at my farewell
party I have referred to it, but could say in all honesty that I had no reason
to suppose this blurb characteristic for Australia. On the contrary.

The country's sadness is perhaps most clearly reflected in the following
comment: "We seem to copy faithfully all American mistakes, but only ten years
later." The estimated period of ten years seems to me to be correct. In many
little things I was reminded of the mid-sixties: the director of the Computer
Centre at ANU was for instance a numerical mathematician, and there was a pro-
nounced concern about programming languages, a type of concern we have completely
outgrown in the meantime.   *   *   *

Just for the record: my weekend near Melbourne was somewhat unusual.
A hundred miles North of Melbourne the wife of a Melbourne surgeon farmed. They
had a landing strip near the farmhouse and the surgeon commuted by private
plane from the farm to his Melbourne hospital and back. He said that he did
spend less time commuting than most of his colleagues in the hospital; this
may be true, from my side I am certain that personally he liked flying. On
Saturday evening he came from the farm to pick us up in Melbourne, the next
evening he brought us back. On Sunday morning the wife and one of the daughters
were away for several hours on horseback, inspecting cattle; in the afternoon
I was taken on a very rough ride in a landrover to see some paddocks with the
surgeon. It was a weekend that showed me a completely different side of
Australian life; besides instructive it was very pleasant, and I had no problems
in expressing my gratitude for their --rather amazing, if you come to think
of it!-- hospitality.   *   *   *

The memories from the visits to Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney get some-
what blurred, Adelaide was lively, Melbourne dismal and Sydney mixed. These
memories will fade. ANU, Canberra, was quite clearly my base. (The trip past
the Universities was tiring because each time I had to adjust to new people;
on Wednesday morning, when I flew back from Sydney to Canberra I had quite
definitely the feeling of "returning home". So much for the tact and hospi-
tality of that community!)

In Canberra I had an appartment in the "University House", built on campus for about 150 graduate students and 150 visitors, very much along the pattern of an English college --complete with quadrangle!--, with a large Common Room (with a Yamaha) and a Hall (complete with a Steinway), in which the University Dinner was held each Wednesday night (We have attended it once). A "Bistro" that served breakfast, lunch and dinner, a "Cellar Bar" that sold meals at lunch time and dinner time, and served beer, much of which was consumed in the nearby "Fellow's Garden". And, around the corner, a "Bottle Shop" --how is that for a euphemism?--, a mini-supermarket and laundry. All this was within a ten minutes walk from the Computer Centre.

Breakfast was served in the Bistro from 8 until 8.45. At nine o'clock I was at the Computer Centre, where I had a nice office --with an air conditioning that I have used twice, on very hot and sticky days-- of which I always left the door open: that trick worked, all sorts of people "just came in". At noon we walked to the cellar bar and had lunch and beer --or just beer, when tired-- and from one o'clock till five I was again at the Computer Centre. Usually we had a beer in the Cellar Bar from half past five until half past six, and then I would have dinner with rotating, but always pleasant company, either in the Bistro, or in town, or at home. The moment I went to sleep varied wildly, I was always awake before eight o'clock in the morning without the mechanical aid. The day after my arrival someone had borrowed sheet music for me --Mozart and Schubert-- and before the trip I have played quite a lot. Only one evening on the Steinway. While doing so I was told that I needed special permission for doing so, because it was the property of the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). Both instruments had suffered from the drought, and yesterday I realized that after a Yamaha a Bösendorfer is the closest possible approximation of heaven. (It had been tuned during my absence.) But for lack of anything better, a Yamaha will do before breakfast.

On one of the last days, one of the staff member dropped in. He was genuinely worried and puzzled, and asked "Why did you come? You did not get anything from this visit." I could answer that I had come, firstly because I had been invited, and secondly, because the way in which the invitation from dr.Robin B.Stanton had been phrased had given me the impression that he had sound reasons for being very keen that I should accept the invitation. Shortly after my arrival I began to understand what Stanton hoped that I would do, and I think that I have done it to the extent that can be achieved in a one-month visit. It was hard work, I had to be alert continuously.

The greatest compliment for my hosts in general and for Stanton's care and initiative in particular is probably Ria's remark when she entered my office a page ago: "I am glad you went." To which I could only add "I am also glad to be home again."

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