



## *Travels with a talkative lady*

***“I’m so Sorry, but I didn’t quite catch the last bit about the cane toad in your toilet. What was it you said again?”*** The old dear looked slightly dazed. She must have been in her 70s, sitting on a handy rock, perspiration rolling down her red cheeks after climbing to the peak of Uluru, in central Australia.



I looked across, and suddenly realized It wasn’t just the steep climb that was affecting her; she was totally bewildered by the rapid-fire anecdotes coming from my partner (perhaps as retribution for the old lady zooming past us - like *Michael Schumacher* with the chequered flag in sight - on the final push for the summit). I was able to empathise quite easily with those head-spinning feelings the old lady was suffering.

That trip to Uluru was the first of many expeditions, over a decade, to various corners of Australasia. I had just taken delivery of a brand-new, mustard-coloured vehicle. My Aussie friends were apt to describe its colour in more derogatory terms (and admittedly I was last in line when the company I worked for was dolling them out) but it was at least effective camouflage for the outback expanses we traversed, going North through Cooper Pedy to *The Alice*. In those days there was no bitumen road, so the car took an incredible (and very noisy) pounding, from rocks hitting the underside, as we traversed the vast *Simpson's Gibber Desert*. In the end, guilt got the better of me, and I loaded the shit-coloured machine onto *The Ghan* train, for the return journey.

A year or so after that my partner demonstrated admirable ingenuity, combined with her infamous ability at storytelling to numb the mind, when we were marooned by a violent storm in a Hobart camping ground. Quick thinking was obvious when she contrived to rebuild our flattened tent,



using bits-and-pieces from our neighbour's demolished home. After that, her talking prowess came to the rescue next morning, after they had looked quizzically at our reconstructed affair, and she immediately launched into a long and complex account of the *Aboriginal Dreamtime* and the dangers of climbing *Uluru*. They wandered off with a pole-less tent in their pack; slightly confused, but none the wiser.

A few days after that, I recall walking out of a Valley Southwest of Hobart and crossing a field, to the increasing sound of music from the blues duo *Sonny Terry & Brownie Maghee*. The music just seemed to fit the scene so well. We had stumbled on a big '*Bush Bash*' and true to form my partner soon talked our way into the party. From there, we danced and drank on through the afternoon and into the night, and ever since then I just have to hear those early blues tracks to be reminded of the festivities that day, in front of the big white homestead, its green lawns running down to the banks of the Huon River. Of course,

if it hadn't been for the outgoing nature of the lady beside me, I probably would have wondered on past.

At times, decided advantages can accrue from travelling with a gregarious person, who never holds back from launching into conversation.

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