



‘Country roads, take me home ...’

I had never been to Canberra before, and this was a fleeting visit. Arriving on the early Monday *politician’s express*, I taxied from the airport to pick up the truck, as arranged. It was all ready, fully loaded with tractor and machinery.



By ten o’clock my six-wheeled friend and I were on our way, following an 800-kilometre cross-country trail back to Adelaide. I had obtained the requisite truck license some months before, but in truth I hadn’t driven any truck, large or small, very far at all. Handling this 10-ton monster by myself, on totally unfamiliar roads, proved initially quite a challenge, but by the time we stopped for the night at a mid-way point Motel, the big brute and I were beginning to know and respect each other.

After an hour on the road the next day, I spotted a couple hitch-hiking up ahead. It was illegal to carry unauthorized passengers in a government vehicle, so I kept on trucking, passing with a wave. Having second thoughts – their company would relieve the boredom



of the bitumen, stretching out to the distant horizon – I pulled onto the dirt fringe. I saw the pair running towards me in the side mirror; packs bouncing, one carrying a guitar.

“*Hey there,*” the guy said, breathing heavily as he looked up at me. “*We’re heading for The Riverland. Can you take us?*”

“*We’d appreciate it*”, He continued. “*We can even sing you songs in exchange.*” With this he smiled, and the young, rather petite lady at his side, began to laugh. I was won over.

“*What the hell,*” I thought. (I’d been on their end of the bargain many times, a few years before in Europe). “*OK, you’ve got yourself a deal,*” I yelled over the clatter of the engine. “*Welcome aboard.*”

They clambered into the cabin, the girl perching on top of the central engine housing. It was the start of a friendship that would last two or three glorious weeks, during which I would come to master a number of new guitar chords.

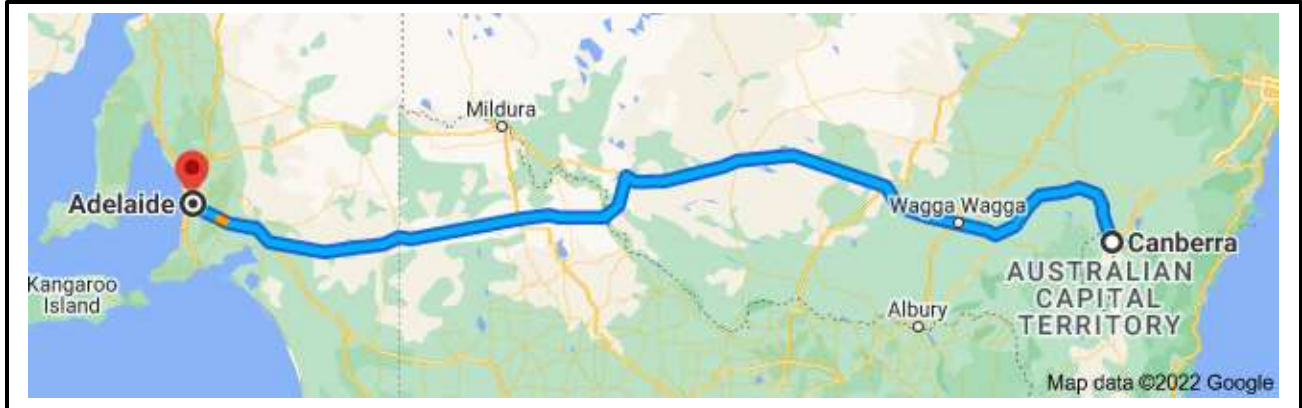
The odd thing about the guy, was that with his long blond wavy locks and round glasses, he was a double for *John Denver*, the popular American country star of the day. And a little later when he pulled the guitar out and began to sing, I really did begin to think it wasn’t a look-alike, but the real thing, ‘*down Under*’ on some sort of incognito tour.



The four or five hours run, down into Adelaide, resembled a country music concert for truckers; His partner had a wonderfully melodic voice, harmonizing perfectly with *young John*, and together they did a mean interpretation of *The Carpenters*.

As we bowled on through *The Riverland*, I invited them to come back to stay. With the boot on the other foot, I recalled something very similar happening to my wife and I when travelling through Germany: an architect taking us off the autobahn and home to ice-cold

Cinzanos. As we parked the mini-juggernaut outside my house, I was hoping desperately that my partner - remembering that time - would be okay with me returning the favour.



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