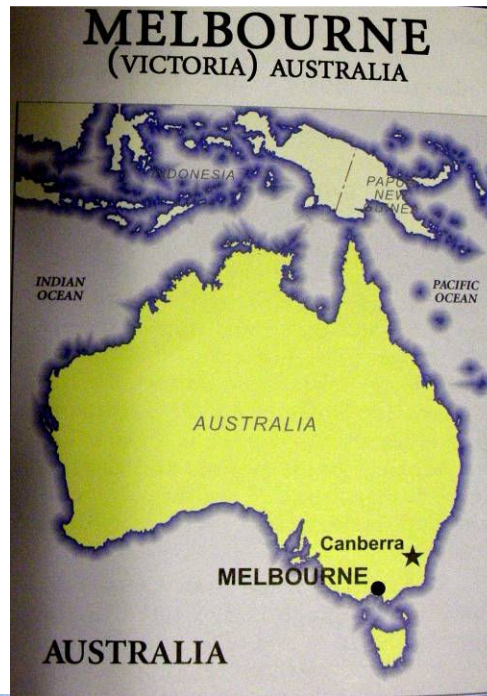


Day 39 –Melbourne–Healesville Sanctuary–Rochford Wine–Puffing Billy-4 Nov. 09:

The day started with mostly clear sky and calm sea as we cruised in to the harbor at Melbourne, Australia. The map below shows where Melbourne is located on the Australian continent.

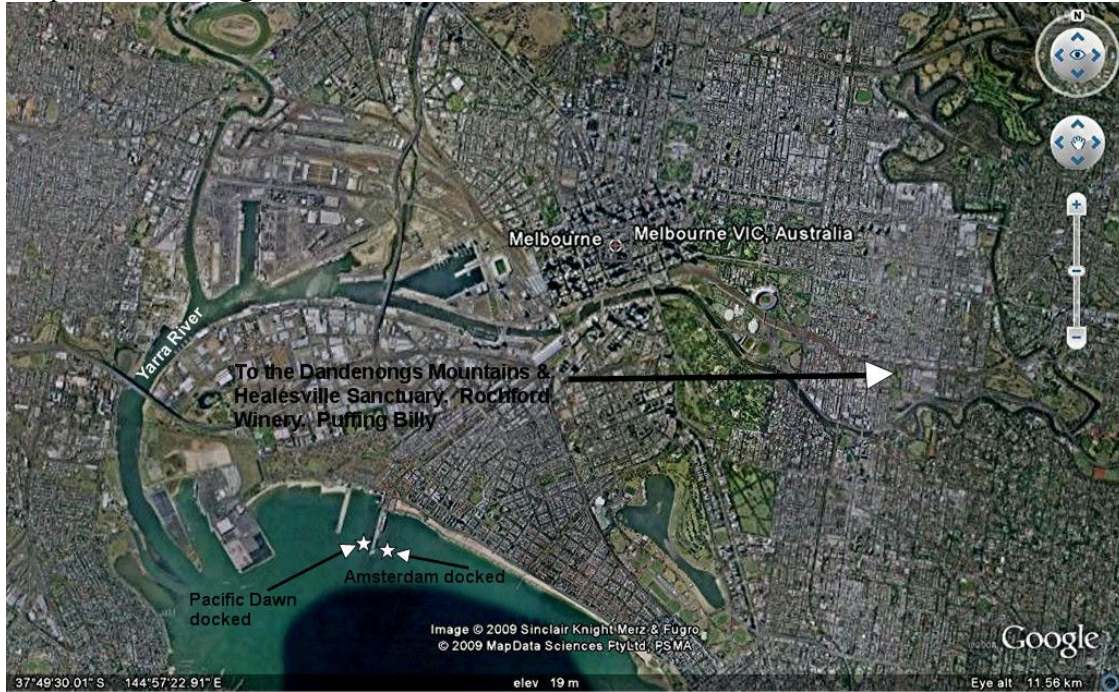


By 6am Melbourne was visible in the distance and there was an early rising hot air balloon dancing along the skyline, as shown below.



The Amsterdam proceeded in to the harbor and docked at the end of the pier on the same side as the ferry boat, Spirit of Tasmania I, and across from the cruise ship Pacific Dawn

The location of the Amsterdam in the Melbourne harbor is shown below in this map adapted from Google Earth.



We always start the day with breakfast in the Lido and look forward to seeing the bright faces of our favorite stewards, shown in this picture on the right. Barbara is keeping close to Pas on her right and Rudy on her left. Their cheerful and helpful attitude always gets us into a happy mood and off to a good day.

In this picture, the Pacific Dawn cruise ship can be seen on the other side of the pier through the window of the Lido.



We had signed up with our Cruise Critic friends, Pauline and Mike (hallpau) for an all-day tour with a company called “A Tour with a Difference” [www.atwad.cin.au]. We were headed east to the Dandenong Mountains and a tour of the Healesville Sanctuary, Rochford Winery and the Puffing Billy Railroad, as indicated in the map above.

The first order of business was to join with Pauline and the rest of her tour group. We met in the Explorer’s Lounge on the Amsterdam and then walked out through the cruise terminal. We had to pass through a gauntlet of Australian Agriculture Inspectors looking

for contraband fruit and other food items carrying pests. They had posted a rather clever sign with a nice play on the sound of some English language words, as shown in the photo on the right. We love the English language and are so glad we don't have to learn how to speak or understand it at this stage in life.

The Inspectors were assisted by their trusty "Detector Dogs". These are very effective guys that we have observed detecting the trace odor from long gone fruit carried in back packs. Knowledge of their presence in the inspection line

is a major deterrent to potential food smugglers who don't take the quarantine laws very seriously.

Here are a couple photos of the dogs at the car inspection station working the ferry boat lanes. These Dogs of Australia are really earning their keep.



Earlier in the morning we had noticed from the deck of the Amsterdam that a great number of motorcycles had lined up on the dock to get on board the Spirit of Tasmania I ferry that had docked behind us on the pier. This photo on the right shows some of the motorcycles down below but many had already gone forward and were collecting near the bow of the ferry.

The ferry makes a run to Tasmania that takes about 12 hours.

As we walked down the pier we saw that the loading of the motorcycles was proceeding rapidly into the bow of the ferry.



There were plenty of cars also loading so the traffic between Tasmania and the mainland of Australia seems like a lively business.

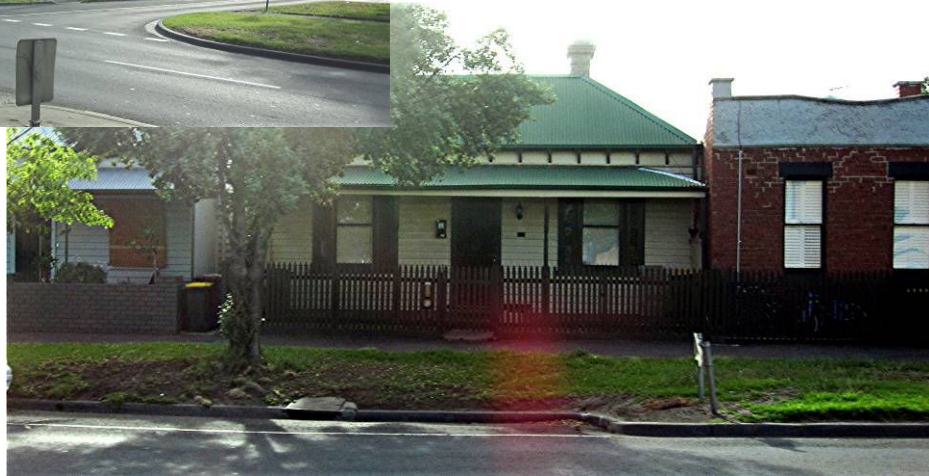
We finally made it out to the city at the head of the pier. Here are a couple pictures of Pauline's happy crowd of 20 cruisers waiting to start the tour in Melbourne.



We met up with Brian and Grace, the owners of A Tour with a Difference, and they loaded our crew into the two Mercedes vans, shown below.



It was a comfortable ride through the suburbs of Melbourne and out into the countryside of the Yarra River Valley. We took some photos of typical Melbourne, Australia homes along the way as shown on the left and below.



We were also able to catch a glimpse of a gasoline station that seemed very popular based on the number of cars stacked up at the pumps, as shown below.



The indicated price for unleaded gas was \$1.179 AUD per liter. At the current exchange rate of \$0.99 USD per AUD, and the approximation of 4 liters per gallon this works out to \$4.76 USD per gallon of gas. At this station it appeared that they had a promotion going where you could bring in a receipt from a nearby Safeway Store and get a 4 cent per liter reduction in the price. That would drop the price to \$1.139 AUD per liter, which undercut other stations we saw this morning and helps explain why this station was so popular.

The road soon headed up into the Dandenong Mountains and we began to see the eucalyptus tree forest, as shown on the left.



We had been in this area during a tour as part of a cruise in 2008 and we started to see some familiar scenes. This was particularly true

when we drove through the little village of Olinda, as shown in this picture on the right.



We had enjoyed a stop here last year and bought a Didgeridoo as a memento of Australia. This morning there was no stopping because we had a schedule packed with activities. In addition, the fact that the Pacific Dawn cruise ship was in town at the same time as us, put more people than usual into the regular tourist stops. Brian and Grace had modified their normal schedule so that we would end up at the Puffing Billy Railroad late in the day after the crowds from the Pacific Dawn had passed through. The Puffing Billy Railroad schedule set the pace for us.

Our first stop was at the Healesville Wildlife Sanctuary where the wild animals of Australia are kept in an environment that is as close to natural as they can make it.

Brian and Grace unloaded coolers full of drinks and snacks at a picnic area set up within the Sanctuary. We were ready for a break by this time so we all pitched in with the set-up.



Before long Brian uncorked the Champagne as Grace completed the set-up and we were all enjoying a little refreshment before the tour of the Sanctuary began.



The Ibis, shown below, was one bird that became visible right away and we needed no guide to see. They were prowling around looking for a handout. One of the Sanctuary guides named John said that the Ibis was the garbage dump bird of Australia. Their long beaks are designed

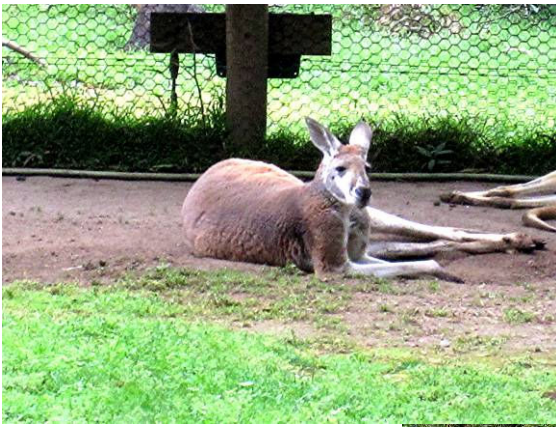
to probe the mud for mollusks and other water creatures but these guys have given that up for a handout.



Our group of 20 was broken up into two smaller groups. We joined a group of 8 led by Wendy. Our first stop was the Koala exhibit. There was only one Koala in sight and he was asleep in a tree, as shown on the right. Wendy explained that Koalas only eat eucalyptus leaves and that doesn't supply much energy. Therefore, the Koalas sleep a great deal of the time.



At the Sanctuary they don't do unnatural things with the Koalas that puts stress on the animals. For example, they don't do things like have people hold them while a photo is taken. If you happen to find a Koala being active and providing a photo opportunity, that is fine but they don't do anything to promote it. That same philosophy was applied in all the exhibits so we didn't get as many good photos of the animals as we had hoped for. However, we agree with the policy of not unduly stressing the animals so we did the best we could in the photography effort.



The big Red Kangaroos were all lying down in a roped off area where we couldn't go in. We took the pictures of those critters from a distance with the best magnification we could muster, as shown on the left. There was a small kangaroo that was occupied

trying to get some grass from the other side of the chicken wire fence. A little girl had picked up some grass and was trying to get the kangaroo to eat it. She made a valiant effort and we captured the moment in the picture on the right.





A bigger “little girl” couldn’t resist petting this kangaroo so we got a picture of her also.

There were a lot of primary school children in the Sanctuary today and their instructors were shepherding them through the exhibits. In this one shown below the blue uniformed kids were

petting stuffed animals to get feel for the texture of the fur.

All primary school children in Australia are required to wear the large brimmed hats that you can see in the photo on the right. This is part of a national effort to protect their faces from harmful sun radiation.



The next thing we saw on our tour was the Laughing Kookaburra bird, shown in the picture on the left. Like many of the photos today, it wasn’t an excellent photo opportunity but the general features of the bird are shown. We got a better photo of a young one during a tour of a Brisbane Zoo a few days ago.



There were signs around the Sanctuary that gave us a good idea of what was available to see. The Wombats and Tasmanian Devils made themselves difficult to see today so we went without photos of them.

The Platyus was a unique Australian animal that was high on our priority list and the Platyus exhibit was our next objective.



Since the Platyus is a nocturnal animal the exhibit had very low lighting. However, the little animal was visible, swimming and crawling



at the water's edge. Unfortunately, bright light from a flash camera is upsetting to the Platyus and flash camera photos are not allowed. We tried taking photos without the flash but none of them were useable. An interesting factoid about the Platyus is that it is a mammal but lays eggs that are incubated and hatch much like a lizard or turtle. When the baby is hatched they find their way to the mother and receive mother's milk until they are able to forage on their own.

On the way out of the Platyus exhibit was this whimsical display of bird houses on the left. The beige house at the bottom of the pole is labeled "Basement".

This Brolga crane, shown on the right was the next animal we saw. He was an elegant looking bird and a good representative of the crane family.



Wendy then took us to the Birds of Prey exhibit where a fellow named Norm put on a show that included several large birds of



prey. Waiting in eager anticipation in the bleachers were these four intrepid cruisers from our tour group, shown on the left. Bottom row R to L: George & Sharon, 2nd row R to L: Sharon & Barbara.

Judy took a higher perch, as shown in the photo on the right, so she could get a different photo from the ones George took. These guys really are serious about photography.



Here is Norm with one of his birds of prey ready to start the show.

It was a good show of how the birds have keen eyesight and have very high precision when they swoop down and pick up food or catch it in mid air.



A lady came on next and had large birds swoop low over the audience on the way to pick up food. That was exciting for the primary school kids, like the ones shown below, who had been assembled in the bleachers with us.



We tried to get a photograph of the birds in action but they were just too quick for us. The picture shown on the right is our best action shot after numerous tries.

This final bird photo, shown below, is a bit more satisfying, showing the noble creature in profile.

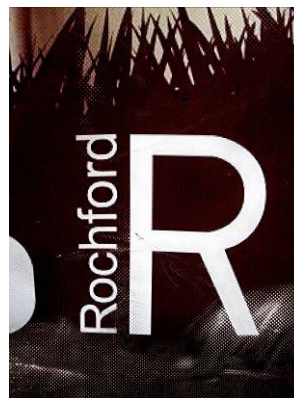


At the conclusion of the Birds of Prey show we gathered our tour group and left the Healesville

Wildlife Sanctuary. We drove about 20 miles and then turned in at the entrance to the Rochford Winery, shown on the right.



A wine tasting expert took our group in tow and we all sat down in the room that had been set up for wine tasting, as shown on the right. He told us that the Rochford Winery, with the fine logo shown on the right, was one of the few wineries in the Yarra Valley that could host really large events. It was a first class place with an impressive display in the entryway, as shown below.



In the wine tasting session that followed we learned how to detect the bouquet and personality of the wine as he exposed us to two white and two red wines. It was enjoyable but we doubt any of us picked up much wine sophistication in the process. The picture on the right shows part of our group at the wine tasting event.



We adjourned from the wine tasting and went in to the dining room for lunch. A couple hours before arriving we had given Brian our choice of meals from the menu. With this preparation we were all soon served the meal we had ordered along with a glass of wine. We had both ordered Kangaroo ragout served on white, brown and wild rice. We all toasted each other and the good times we were experiencing as the cameras clicked.

The Kangaroo ragout turned out to be a tasty dish not unlike beef stroganoff.



After lunch we took a stroll around the winery and got a picture of part of the huge vineyard as shown on the left.



Near the dining room were some vineyards that were particularly inviting so we included them in our stroll around the grounds, as shown on the right. However, this curious “No Access” sign looked serious so we turned around before testing the system further.



With the very satisfying lunch stop concluded we all piled back into the vans and headed for the Puffing

Billy Railroad. After a 15 or 20 minute ride we arrived at a small railroad station in the rolling countryside. This was the Menzies Creek Station on the Puffing Billy Railroad Line. It turns out that in the early 1900s and up to the 1950s the remote areas of the Dandenongs Mountains were served by this railroad that was built to help the farmers get their produce to market and people to get to and from town. It used ancient steam engines known as Puffing Billy on the narrow gage railroad line. After the 1950s highways were improved and the railroad fell into disuse. Starting in the 1980s some local activists saw the value in having the Puffing Billy Railroad restored to its old grandeur. It is manned by dedicated volunteers and appears to be in top condition with clean and neat stations and engines with polished brass controls.

We took a few photos of the scenes around the station. This sign on the right encourages the farmer to send his goods to market on the train. This sign was probably given by a company donating the lubricating oil.



The fact that the whole endeavor relies on volunteer labor is indicated by this sign on the right.



Brian and Grace had worked hard during the day to allow us sufficient time to enjoy our tours and still get us to the Puffing Billy Railroad station in time to catch the last train down the



mountain. We had only been in the station for about 10 minutes when Puffing Billy pulled into the station as shown on the left.

There were a lot of Asian tourists along with us Amsterdam types cheering the little engine into the

station.

We clambered aboard the open windowed cars and took our seats. Of course, some of us (aka Sharon) had to push the limits and hang our legs out the window, as shown on the right.



We satisfied ourselves with a less imaginative photo at the window.



The train took off down the mountain. There was a clickity-clack of the wheels on the tracks that reminded us of roller coaster rides at amusement parks. However, the ride was smooth and we gracefully passed through the forested and hilly countryside. The following pictures show some of the giant tree ferns, and other scenes that unfolded as we rolled along.

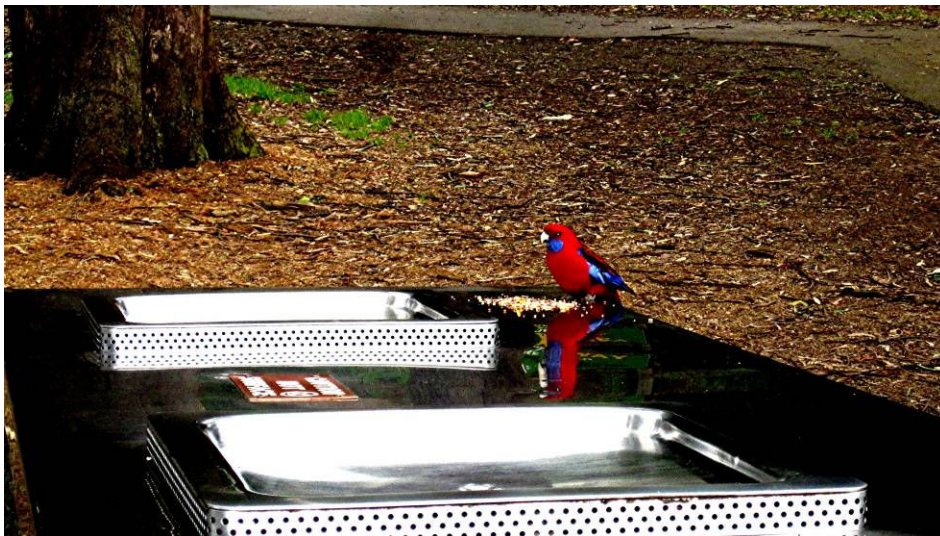


Sharon had pulled her legs inside the car when we started but somebody in a car up ahead of us was hanging out Big-Time as shown in this photo on the right. This practice may not have been approved by the Railroad's Insurance Company.



The tree ferns were spectacular all along the route we took through the Dandenongs.

After about a 30 minute ride we reached our final station and debarked at the Lakeside Station. Brian and Grace had driven the vans down to this station and picked us up there. Before leaving, Grace spread some bird seed at a barbeque in a little park beside the station and that attracted a beautiful Lorikeet as shown on the right.

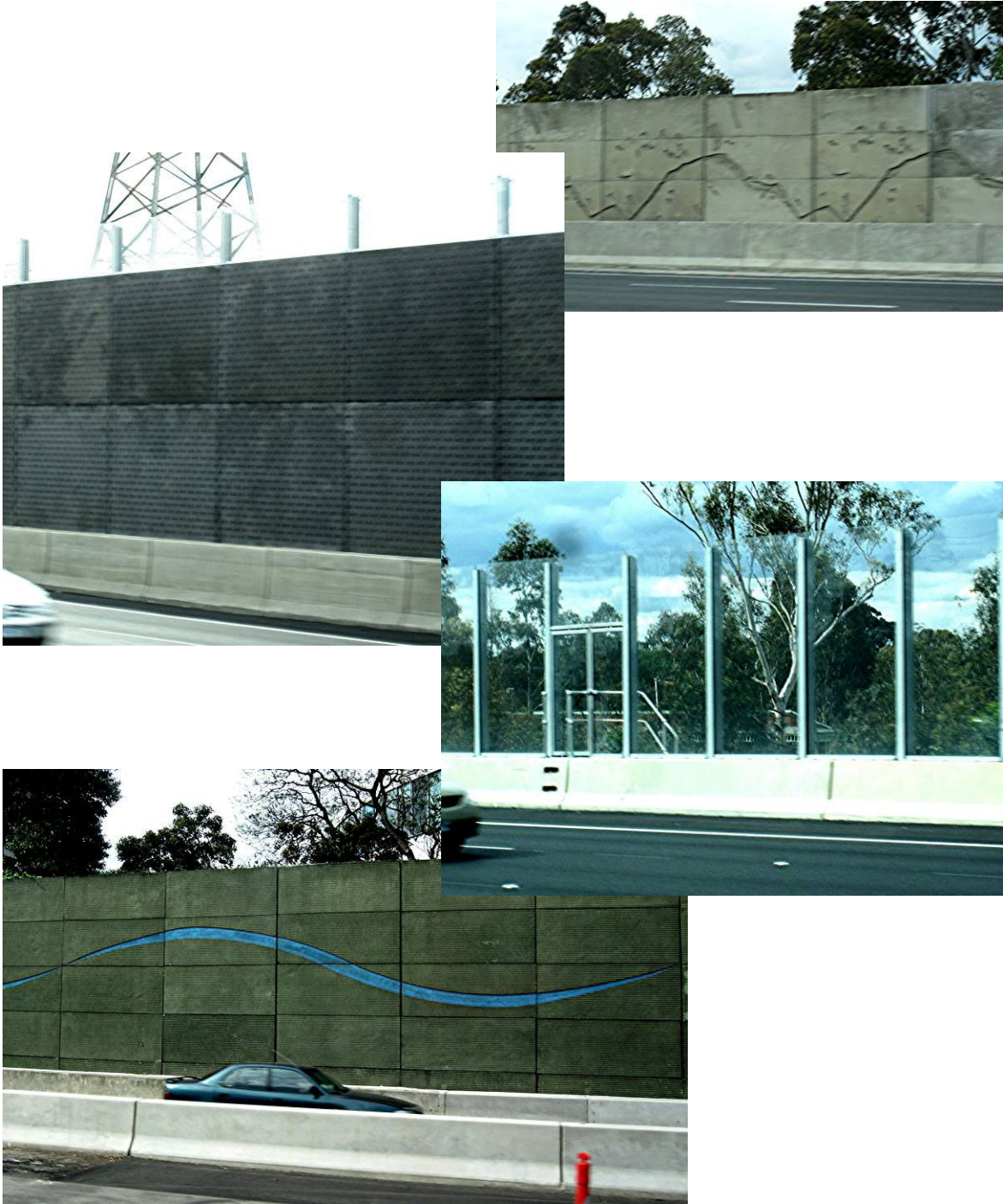


This is our Lorikeet on the “Barbi”.

These gas fired public barbeques are a common sight in the Australian parks that we have seen.

The vans took us on down the rest of the way into the Yarra River Valley and we returned to Melbourne. Outside of Melbourne we got onto a multilane freeway and went through town on our way to the Amsterdam. Along the way Barbara became intrigued by the different types of sight & sound barriers that had been constructed between the freeway and residential area in the 15 or 20 miles stretch of freeway that we traveled.

Here are a few samples of what we saw.



Finally, about 5pm we reached the pier where the Amsterdam was docked. We only had 30 minutes to spare before the sail away at 5:30pm. We thanked Brian and Grace for a great day of touring the Dandenongs and said our good-byes. We then made our way back on to the Amsterdam with plenty of time to spare.

After we got back we made a traumatic discovery that the visit of Barbara's library card had not been properly documented while we were on shore. Catastrophe was avoided when we looked over the rail of our verandah and noticed the flag of the "Port of Melbourne" waving in the breeze. With a little contortion we were able to get the following picture which contains the image of the "Port of Melbourne" flag, thus providing the crucial evidence we had missed on our tour.



About 5:30pm Captain Eversen came on the PA system and said we would be delayed in leaving Melbourne because the Pacific Dawn had clearance to get underway before the Amsterdam. We were at dinner and it didn't make much difference to us. However, about 5 minutes later the Captain came on the horn again and said that due to changing circumstances the Amsterdam was now cleared to leave ahead of the Pacific Dawn and we were leaving now. We watched out the back windows of the dining room as we moved out of the dock area.

As we continued to look at Melbourne receding from us there suddenly appeared a flotilla of sailing boats close to our stern. They were tacking back and forth and having a grand time, perhaps celebrating our departure. Here is the picture we took looking out from the back of the dining room. The Pacific Dawn can be seen firmly attached to the dock. Just like when we left Sydney, these Aussies really come out with their sailboats.



We sailed out of the huge harbor at Melbourne and headed south towards the east coast of Tasmania on our way to Hobart. Tomorrow is a day at sea while we ply down the east coast of Tasmania.