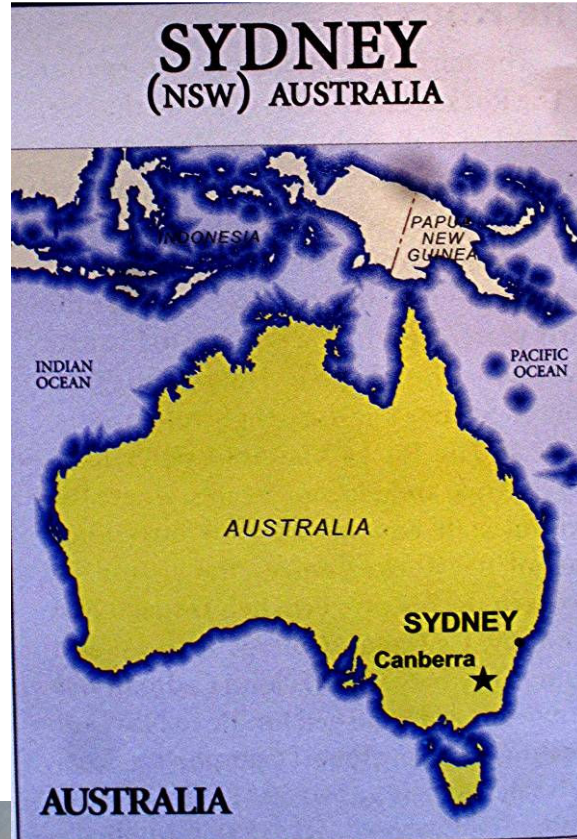


**Day 35 – Sydney, Australia – Bridge Climb – Opera House & Mikado – 31 Oct. 09:**  
The day started with overcast sky and calm sea as the Amsterdam waited a few miles offshore for the pilot to arrive so that we could go into Sydney Harbour.

The map below shows where Sydney is located on the southeast coast of Australia. Also shown is Canberra, the capital of Australia, which is south of Sydney.



As we approached the headlands and entrance to Sydney Harbour we got this photo below. The Harbour Bridge is faintly visible in the far background near the middle with the tall buildings of Sydney on the left and buildings in Balgowlah Heights, a suburb of Sydney, on the far right.



The Amsterdam slowly glided into Sydney Harbour and we were treated to a great panoramic view of the city, the Opera House and Harbour Bridge, as shown below. Entering Sydney Harbour was definitely a highlight for this cruise.



We were fortunate because the Amsterdam was to be docked at the Circular Quay Cruise Terminal which is within a few blocks of the Opera House and other important tourist destinations in Sydney. Larger cruise ships have to be docked in Darling Harbour because at Circular Quay they would hinder the flood of ferry boat traffic going in and out of Sydney Cove. The Amsterdam pulled in and docked at the Overseas Passenger Terminal Building as shown on the right. The southern end of the Harbour Bridge and a portion of The Rocks historical area visible in the photo illustrating the fact that this is a prime location for any cruise ship.





To provide some orientation for the exploration of Sydney a street map showing some of the places we visited is posted below.





After the ship was cleared by local authorities, the first order of business for us was to do the “Bridge Climb” on the Harbour Bridge. About 8:30am we left the Amsterdam and walked up to the south end of the Harbour Bridge through the area known as The Rocks. This is the location of the first European settlement in Australia. The prisoners from England and their guards build primitive shelters here during the first few years in the late 1700s. The city has preserved some of the cave-like areas and they have been incorporated into the “back yard” of some restaurants and retail stores fronting on the business street. If you know the back streets and through-building passageways, as we know now, you can pass through this “Old Rocks” area on the way to the bridge. Here on the right is a picture of some of the caves that were used as part of the shelter for the early settlers.



We finally arrived at the Bridge Climb facilities that have banners touting the unique product they have to offer. This seemed like an ideal time to record the visit of Barbara’s library card to Sydney so we photographed it with the BridgeClimb Banner, as shown on the left. The BridgeClimb facilities occupy the space created by two of the huge concrete arches that support the highway approach to the span of the bridge.

Inside we found that some of our Amsterdam friends had arrived earlier and were at the counter, as shown here.



We tried to get into the same 14 person team with our friends but that team was full. We paid the \$198 AUD (\$200 USD) per person

(OUCH!) and hooked up with another 14 member team that was scheduled to start the BridgeClimb process about 5 minutes after we got the ticket. Some of the team we joined is shown in the photo on the right. As can be told from a quick look we were the “most experienced” folks on this team. They were mostly from Britain but 3 or four were from an Australian town north of Sydney that we can’t remember. We didn’t let the fact that they were younger than our kids bother us. In fact, Barbara was chosen as the model for demonstrating how to put on the gear that was needed for the climb.



The whole BridgeClimb takes about 3.5 hours and about 1.5 hours of that time is spent in the preparation and closeout activities. First, a lady named Jess, took us through some preliminary checks. We all took a breathalyzer test for alcohol and filled out forms designed to screen out people who were obviously medically unsuited for this kind of activity. We stashed cameras, wristwatches, and all other removable objects in a locker and were issued full body coveralls that we put on over regular clothes. Anything that could be dropped was tied on to the coveralls. Closed toe shoes were required and those people in open sandals got closed toe “loaner” shoes to wear. A fellow named Dean then took charge of us for the actual climb over the bridge. We were given a course on how to use the Latch-Way safety cable equipment when going up and down ladders. For details on the Latch-Way system check out the Sydney visit in our blog at <http://2008asiaacruise.thestansfields.com/> .

Finally we were ready to go and we went out through a passageway that had been cut through the concrete pillar between two of the bridge arches. On the right is a picture we had taken this earlier of another team leaving through the passageway that Dean claimed cost \$500,000 AUD to cut and finish for the expansion and BridgeClimb facility improvement program they had just been completed last month. We slid our Latch-Way slider device onto a 3/8 inch diameter stainless steel cable and we were then firmly attached to the bridge until we climbed up and back from the peak of the bridge and returned to the safety of the dressing rooms.



While doing the BridgeClimb Dean took pictures of us at different points on the bridge. After the climb we had an opportunity to purchase these pictures which were supplied as



printed glossy photos and recorded on a CD. Of course, we had to go whole hog and buy the complete package for \$69.95 AUD (\$70.60 USD). The whole BridgeClimb program seems to be based on that old free market system of charging what the market will bear and so far the market for the BridgeClimb seems to be holding up at these elevated prices.

Here are the pictures we got of our BridgeClimb Experience.



This one catches the enthusiasm of the moment as well as the Opera House and the Amsterdam at the dock.

We wore earphones while on the bridge so we could hear Dean's commentary but we slid them to the back for these photos.

Dean, our guide suggested we put on an "attitude face". In this one Barbara is thinking "Whatever it cost it's worth it." while Orlin darkly contemplates the credit card bill coming in.



We are happy again in this one with the Amsterdam at the dock and the beautiful Sydney skyline in the background.



The next team of 14 people are hot on our heels in this one as we celebrate the victory of reaching the peak of the bridge. In this photo we are crossing over on the connecting beam before making the downward trip. This picture clearly shows how Orlin is securely fastened to the safety cable. Barbara is fastened behind him to the same cable.

The picture below shows all 14 of the team members celebrating the arrival at the peak. Orlin and Barbara are safely tucked into the middle of the pack.





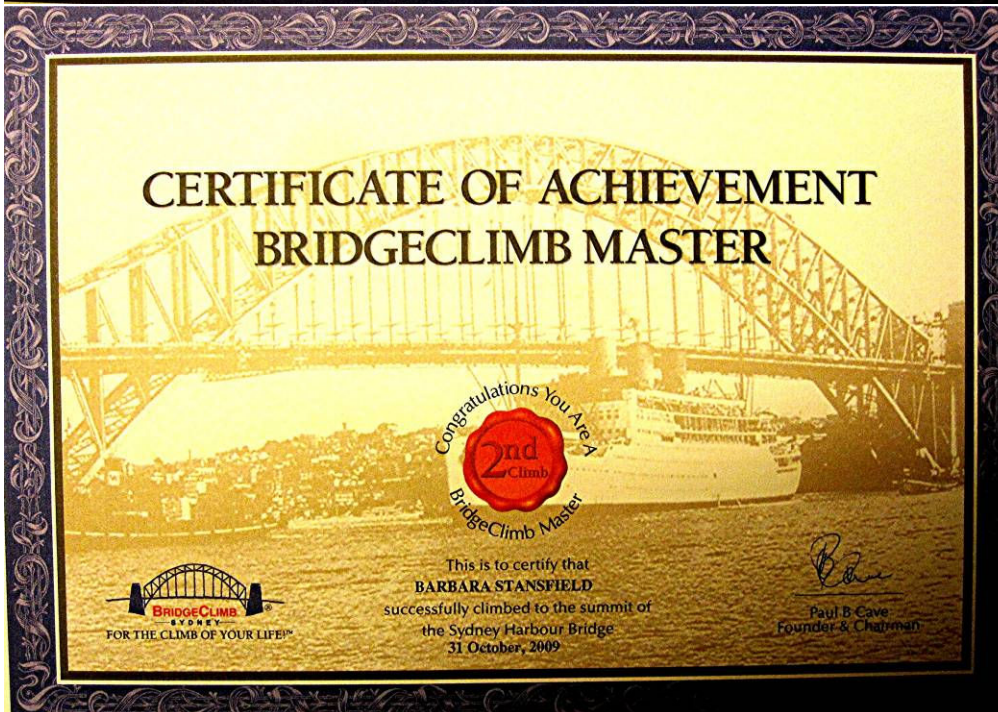
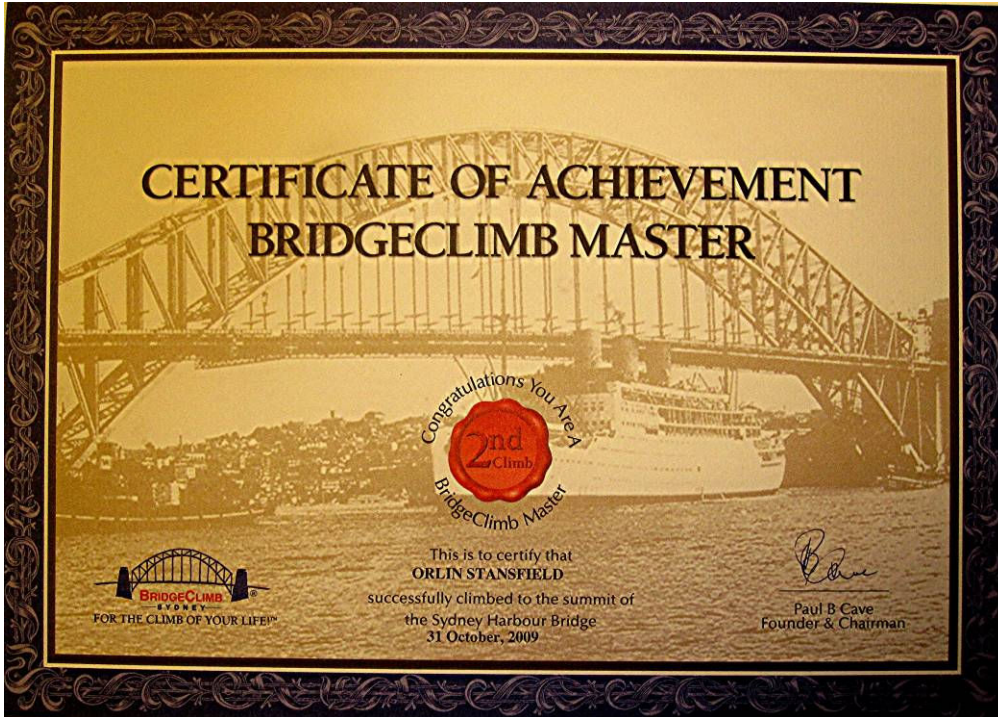
After we returned to earth, Dean took us through the process of removing our safety equipment and tossing the coveralls into the laundry basket. We had taken fleece jackets with us in fanny packs as a precaution in case it was cold on the bridge. The temperature was just right and the wind was gentle so there was no need to use the jackets. Our guide, Dean, commented that the hottest day he ever experienced on the bridge was New Year's Day three years ago. Us northern hemisphere types had to think about that a few seconds before remembering that New Year's Day falls in the middle of their summer down here. Before saying goodbye to Dean we got this photo with him, as shown on the right.



We had climbed the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2008 when we were here. We were completely thrilled and satisfied by that first climb and the second one was even better because we knew what to expect. However, two times is probably enough and we'll find something else to do the next time we are in Sydney.



As a little memento the BridgeClimb people print up an 8.5x11 inch certificate for everyone who completes the BridgeClimb. We were presented our certificates which are proudly shown below (The certificates are actually the same color). We were glad to see that they even gave us credit for this being our second BridgeClimb.





After completing the BridgeClimb we walked back down through The Rocks where a Saturday flea market had been set up in one of the streets. The souvenir type goods were nicely displayed on tables under festive tents as shown on the right and below.



It was fun to browse through the wares. We ended up buying an 11 x 14 inch print showing a Sydney Harbour scene that we liked.

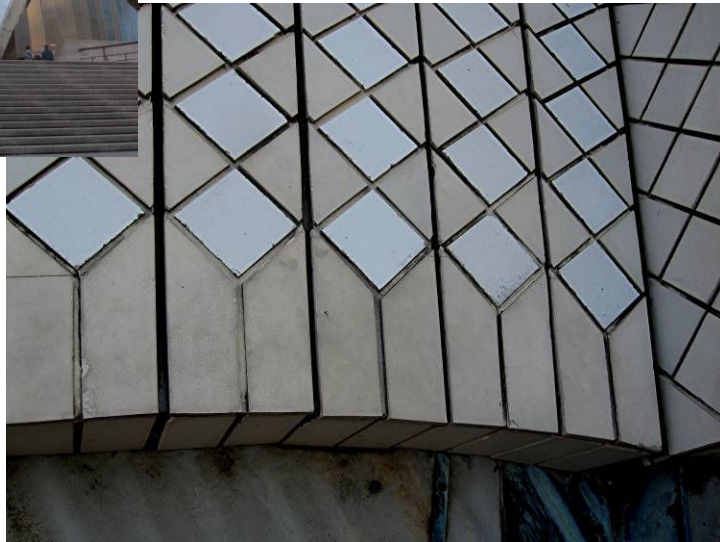


After returning to the Amsterdam for lunch we left the ship again and walked around the end of Circular Quay to where the Sydney Opera House is located. It doesn't seem possible to approach the Sydney Opera House without taking pictures of it. We took a couple as shown on the right and below.



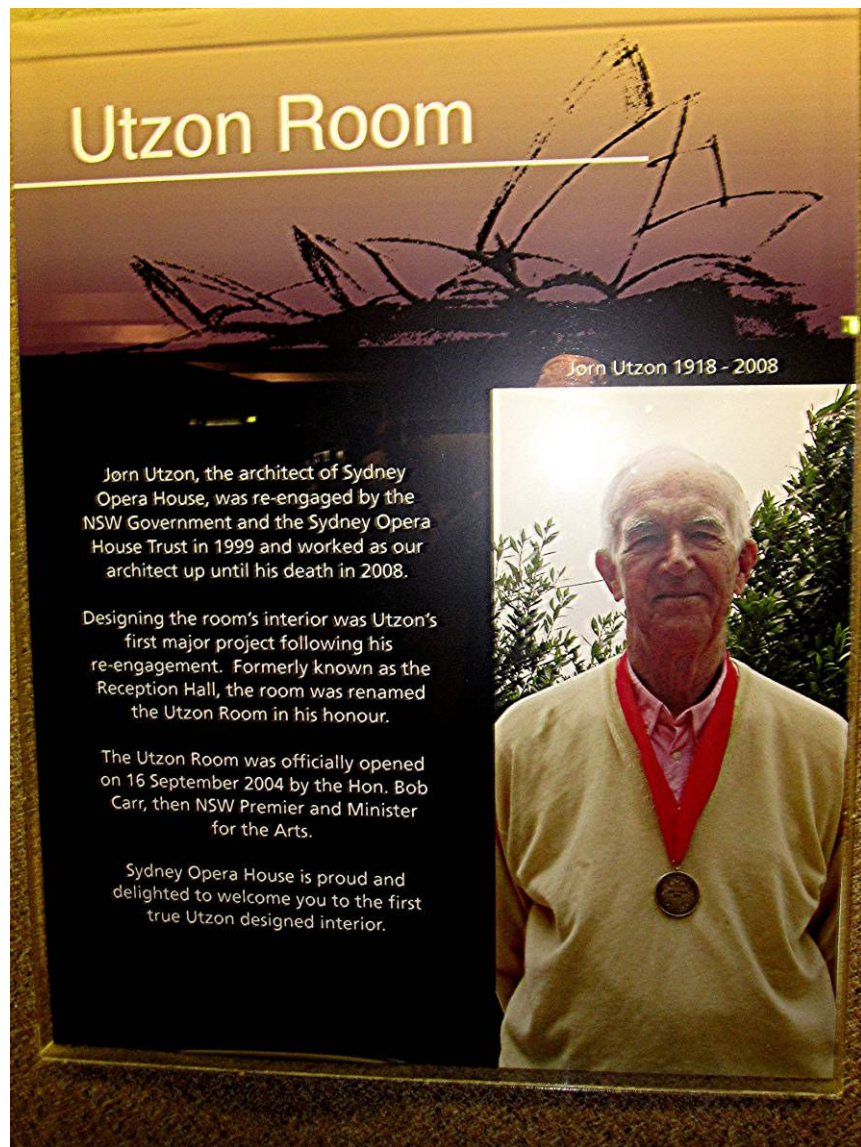
Orlin can never stop himself from looking at some detail. In the case of the Opera House we note that it is covered with two types of ceramic tile. There is a white, smooth glazed

tile and a gray matte textured tile arranged as shown in the photo below. When viewed from a distance the color appears to be white or cream colored depending on the lighting conditions.



Back in June Barbara had made an on-line purchase of reserved seats for tonight's playing of the opera "Mikado". We stopped by the ticket counter and picked up our tickets for Row K seats 39 and 40. It was a sold-out performance so the advance planning really paid off.

While in the Opera House picking up the tickets we explored some of the different public areas. We were surprised when we came upon the Utzon Room. Jorn Utzon was the Danish architect who designed the Sydney Opera House. Our surprise at finding his name here was caused by what we had heard previously how he had been scorned and severely criticized because of engineering problems and huge cost overruns during construction of the Opera House in the 1960s. The criticism had been so harsh that Utzon left Australia during construction and never returned to Sydney to view the completed building. In spite of all the problems during construction, the Sydney Opera House has become an icon of visionary architecture. Imitation of the nested shell concept is common now and photographs of the Sydney Opera House can be seen around the world. We were saddened when we first heard the story of how Utzon's architectural genius had been overshadowed by the engineering, financial and political problems that the Opera House generated in Sydney. We were elated today to find that before his death in 2008 there had been reconciliation between Utzon and the leaders of Sydney in 1999. He had been commissioned to design a room of the Opera House and the Room was named the Utzon Room. The placard on the wall for the room is shown on the right. Unfortunately, when the room was officially opened in 2004 Utzon was too frail to make the trip to Sydney from his home so he never did see the completed structure in person. Regardless of that fact, finding this piece of information about Jorn Utzon was a happy moment for us today. .





We returned to the Amsterdam with our tickets and had dinner before getting dressed and walking over to the Opera House for the 7:30pm performance of the Mikado. Except for wearing a tuxedo on formal nights Orlin had not worn a tie during the whole cruise, so far. Tonight was an exception as he broke out the standard white shirt and tie for the opera. About 6:30 we left the Amsterdam and walked over to the Opera House. Along the way we got a friendly man to take our picture with the Opera House in the background, as shown on the right.



As we approached the Opera House we could see that what is called the “East Bank” of Circular Quay is a popular night spot for tourists and folks of Sydney. It’s a lovely venue and no wonder that people want to come to this spot to enjoy a pleasant night out on the town. The pictures on the left and below try to show the

scene we saw as we approached the Opera House.



We strolled around on the terrace outside the Opera Theater and enjoyed the harbour view for a while after arriving. About 7:15 we went in and took our seats in the theater. We were pleased to find they were actually as good as we had hoped. Orlin immediately stood up and took the (non-flash) photo of the stage shown on the right. In an instant an usher bounded over



and we got instructions that photography of any kind was not allowed. Barbara, exercising a little more discretion in a sitting position calmly pointed the camera and got these photos without being tossed out of the theater.



The two act comedy opera of *The Mikado*, written by Gilbert and Sullivan was an absolute joy to attend. The actors were superb and the orchestra was tops. There was even a sub

title screen that showed, in English, what the actors were singing. The lead actor, Anthony Warlow, played the part of Ko-Ko the Lord High Executioner and he did the job to perfection. Although the opera is set in Japan, the actors spoke with their normal English. Anthony Warlow, in his Australian accent, got a lot of laughs from the audience



when he updated the script to include some Australian politicians and annoying email senders in his list of people to execute. There were other light hearted asides that kept us laughing. The Mikado is supposed to be a comedy but we had the feeling that the Aussie carefree attitude really made this opera more enjoyable than it might otherwise have been.

The opera came to a rousing conclusion and the actors made a curtain call. It was a wonderful evening and the setting could not have been more enjoyable for us. We walked back to the Amsterdam along the Circular Quay. The night life along the Quay still seemed to be going strong as we boarded the Amsterdam. The night of October 31, Halloween Eve back home, was quickly drawing to a close. We then realized that we hadn't seen any Halloween decorations in Sydney. We conclude that Halloween in a big Australian city, like Sydney, doesn't get much attention, particularly around a high tourist area like Circular Quay.

We brought this day to a close. Tomorrow will be the second day in Sydney for the Amsterdam. We plan to explore the Botanical Gardens near the Opera House and stroll down George Street to the Queen Victoria Building, one of our favorite malls in Sydney.