

Anne and Dave's Christmas Letter for 2019

Dear friends and family,

This letter comes with our best wishes for a very happy Christmas Season 2019 and excellent health and happiness for all in 2020.

We seem to have had such a busy year that some of it is already drifting into the past - hopefully the photos will help to remind us of all the good times!

The year started with a memorable two-week trip to South Australia, visiting Adelaide and Wilpena Pound with a private escort to drive us around and give us plenty of history of the Ikara-Flinders Ranges.



Ikara-Flinders Ranges - Dave and Anne at the Razorback Lookout on Bunyeroo Gorge Road (left), and Detail of Ikara-Flinders Ranges from Razorback Lookout (right)



Ikara-Flinders Ranges – Vertical rocks at Warren Gorge near Yarrah (left), Sand Goanna on track up to Wangara Lookout at Wilpena Pound (middle), and Dickinsonia, an Ediacarian fossil sculpture at Parachilna Roadhouse (right)



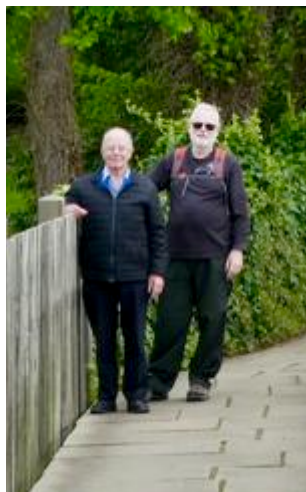


Murray River – The Murray Princess moored at Murray Bridge (upper left),
Early morning light on the river banks near Murrawong (upper right),
Pelican gliding around in the early morning near Purnong Lagoon (lower left),
and Sculpture of Australian wedge tailed eagle
in the Adelaide Terminal of the Indian Pacific (lower right)

We finished our South Australian holiday with a Murray River Cruise on the famous beautifully-restored paddle-wheel steamer, the Murray Princess, and returning on the Indian Pacific train to Sydney via Broken Hill.

We had a brief visit to see Derek and Lisa on the farm where we caught up with Sean, Clare and young Archie before we took off for another grand final (for Anne anyway) trip to Europe.

The adventure took us to Manchester, London, and then across the channel by Eurostar to Paris for our French river cruise. While in the UK we managed to catch up with Don and Vera, Val and Chris, Jenny and John, and Anne's niece Nicola with her younger son William to visit Buckingham Palace Mews and Westminster Cathedral on a freezing cold snowy day!



Chester, UK – Don and Dave on Chester's Roman wall (left),
Bird on River Dee Weir near Handbridge (middle), and the Eastgate Clock, Chester (right)

Paris was equally cold and wet however we only spent a night there before travelling with other cruise members to Challons-sur-Saône where we boarded the Scenic Sapphire to travel and explore mediaeval towns and castles down the Saône and Rhône rivers to Marseille and back to Avignon.

On the way we made several land tours including bus drives to see the Ardèche National Park, the World Heritage Museum of the Caverne du Pont-d'Arc, the Camargue district and Vincent van Gogh's refuge at Saint Rémy de Provence where he painted so many of his masterpieces.

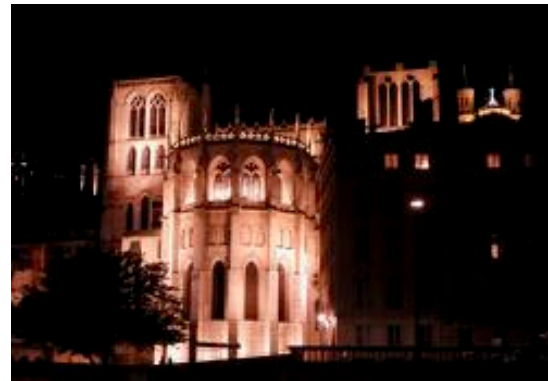
It ended with a long bus ride to Nice where we encountered chaos, a demonstration by the yellow shirts, our cancelled flight, followed by three hours sleep before catching an early morning flight to Zurich to connect up with a flight to Singapore.



Beaune, Burgundy, France – Hospices de Beaune exterior (left) and interior (right)



Chateau de Cormatin, near Tournus, Burgundy, France – External facade (left), and the Bedchamber of the Marquis de Cormatin (right)



Lyon, Rhône-Alpes, France – River view of lights of Lyon (left), and Evening view of the Cathedrale Saint-Jean-Baptiste (right)



Lyon, Rhône-Alpes, France – Ceiling of the Cathedrale Saint-Jean-Baptiste (left), View from the Basilica with "Pencil" and "Eraser" buildings (centre), and the Scenic Sapphire moored at Lyon (right)



Tournon-sur-Rhône, Rhône-Alpes, France – River panorama from the Chateau (above),
View from below of the Chateau (lower left), and Gate to the Chateau (lower right)



Viviers, Rhône-Alpes, France – Narrow street in Viviers (far left)
Cathedral of St Vincent, Viviers - Entrance (mid-left), Organ (mid-right), and Tower (far right)



Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Rhône-Alpes, France – View of the Ardèche River (left),
the Pont-d'Arc, a natural bridge across the Ardèche River (middle), and
Chauvet Cave discoverers with cave paintings [Grotte Chauvet 2 Ardèche] (right)



Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France – Vines with river stones (left), Barrel Room at Maison Bouachon (middle), and Town centre with Hotel de Ville (right)



Avignon, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France – Le Pont d'Avignon (upper left), Roofscape (middle left), Marianne, the national emblem of France, on the Monument du Comtat, Avignon (upper right), the Pope's Palace (lower left), Painted windows in Avignon (lower centre), and Transportation at the Pope's Palace (lower right)



Pont-du-Gard, Languedoc, France – Le Pont-du-Gard (left), and showing adjacent road bridge (right)



Uzès, Languedoc, France –
The Duchy (Ducal Palace) (left), Atelier des Ours (ladies clothing store) in Uzès (middle), and
Flower market in the Place aux Herbes (Market Square) (right)



Farewell Dinner at the Pope's Palace, Avignon, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France –
Dinner in the barrel-vaulted main dining room (left),
Dave and Anne at the Farewell Dinner (upper right), and
Marvellous musical entertainment (lower right)



Ornithological Park, La Camargue, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France –
Flamingos in flight (upper left), Egret (upper middle), Ragondin (coyup) (upper right),
Flamingos chasing food (lower left), Heron talking flight (lower middle), and White stork (lower right)



St Paul de Mausole, Saint Rémy de Provence, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France –
Statue of Vincent van Gogh in gardens (upper left), Entrance tower (upper middle),
Cloisters and internal garden (upper right), Iris in the gardens with Vincent van Gogh's Les Iris (lower left),
and various flowers in the gardens (lower middle and right)



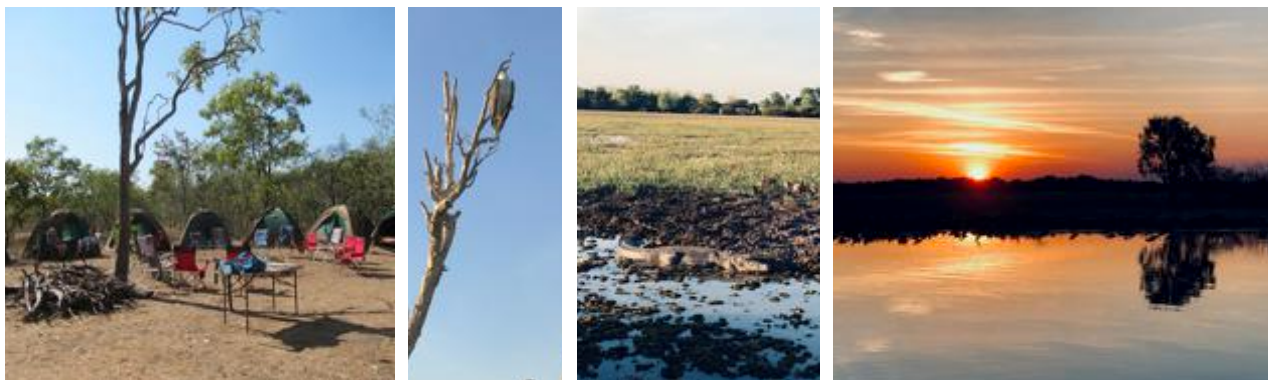
Farewell at Avignon, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France –
The three girls (left), Scenic Sapphire's bell (middle), and the three boys (right)

Singapore was a welcome three-day break during our return, where we rested and caught up with Derek's elder son Pete, his wife and their two sons, and did a bit of wandering round the Malay Quarter (part of Singapore we had missed on previous visits) and explored the fascinating Jewel at Changi Airport before flying home.



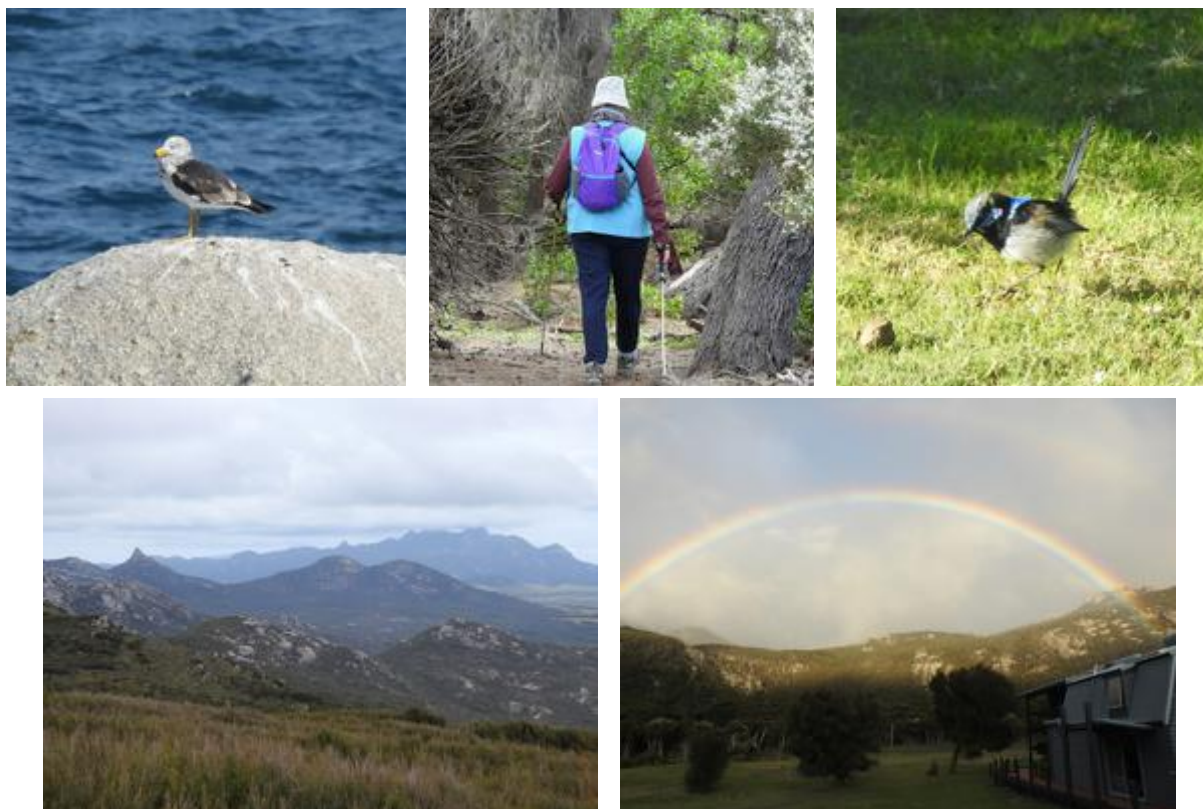
Singapore, Malaysian Quarter – Sultan Mosque (far left), and Street art on Haji Lane (mid-left)
Singapore, Jewel at Changi Airport – Waterfall (mid-right), and Illuminated gardens (far right)

Dave has spent a good portion of the year improving his fitness level to be able to keep up with daughter Alex on a five-day walking trek in Kakadu National Park as well as other activities. The trek was in mid-winter but still hot, the terrain rugged and tough but an unforgettable experience. Aboriginal art caves and dips into several pools below spectacular waterfalls made the days even more enjoyable, with of course the (not very) glamp-camping.



Kakadu, NT – camp site (far left), eagle (mid left), salt-water crocodile (mid right), and sunset on Red Lily Billabong (far right)

During the first week in October we flew via Melbourne and Launceston to Flinders Island off the north eastern tip of Tasmania. We hired a rough old car to get around staying in a very comfortable resort (the only affordable one on the Island). Being out of season we had the whole place to ourselves and were very spoilt by our host, who also helped us plan to get maximum benefit from our three days exploring and fed us excellent meals. The weather was very kind, being warm with only two showers of rain during the whole stay. It was sad to leave.



Flinders Island, TAS – Pacific Gull near Loccata (upper left), Anne on Trousers Point Track (upper centre), Blue wren near our lodge (upper right), Looking south from Walkers Lookout (lower left), and Rainbow from our lodge (lower right)

From Flinders Island we returned to Launceston to collect a car and take a leisurely drive down to Hobart, staying in an old guest-house at the top of Battery Point with fantastic views across the river Derwent.

After enjoying Salamanca Market and the Botanic Gardens, Dave set off to join a group taking the Three Capes Lodge Walk (a four-day 45 kms walk by the Tasmanian Walking Company) in style, staying at up-market lodges offering comfort, good dining, wine, and with magnificent views (helped by magnificent weather).



Three Capes Lodge Walk, Tasman Peninsula, TAS –
 Morning view from our lodge (upper left), Sea cliff view (upper right),
 Tasman Island from track end (lower left), and Dave and others at track end ((lower right)

Anne in the meanwhile did her own exploring, spending a day on a small bus tour to Bruny Island, travelling across the ferry from Kettering in the north, down through the neck to the Penguin Rookery to the far southern tip and Cape Bruny lighthouse. On the way various Bruny Island delicacies were sampled – oysters, cheeses, chocolates, fudge, honey, breads and even a whiskey distillery. She also visited the Museum and Art Gallery and took a cruise on the Derwent. Our last day was occupied by a drive to the top of Mount Wellington to admire the views – it was freezing cold and very windy!

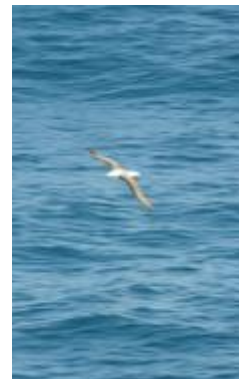
Dave was finally able to tick off a long-standing bucket list item with a fabulous cruise with Dr Karl Kruszelnicki to Antarctica in November/December. It was organised by World Expeditions with Arctic and Antarctic cruise experts Oceanwide Expeditions who were excellent throughout.

The cruise was for 12 days from Ushuaia at the tip of Argentina across Drake Passage to the northernmost part of mainland Antarctica, seeing penguins, whales, seals and many seabirds, encountering icebergs and glaciers and taking shore excursions on zodiacs to hike around on snowshoes. The ship also visited Chilean and British Antarctic base camps – the latter with a postal service for Antarctica-stamped postcards! One of the highlights of the cruise was the series of talks given by world experts on Antarctic wildlife and ecosystem as well as cosmology and global warming.

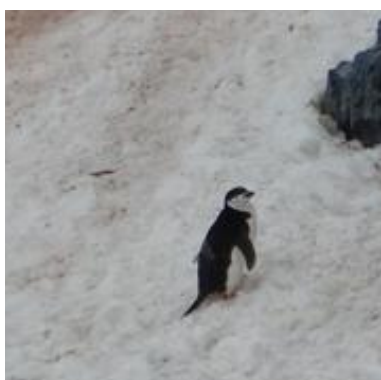
The air flights via New Zealand were lengthy but premium economy seats really paid off with extra luggage and space allowance. Overnights and extra days in Buenos Aires and Ushuaia meant that Dave was away for 3 weeks leaving Anne to look after things in his absence.



Ushuaia, Argentina – The Ortelius getting ready to leave for our Antarctic Cruise (left), Life jacket drill on the heli-deck (middle), and late evening light as we cruise down the Beagle Channel (right)



Drake Passage – A very calm crossing of the Drake Passage was accompanied by lots of seabirds, including Wandering Albatross (left) and Cape Petrel (right)



Orme Bay, Antarctic Peninsula – Disembarking for our first excursion ashore (upper left), Zodiac with passengers (upper middle), Ortelius in light sea-ice at Orne Bay (upper right), Chinstrap penguin (lower left), Antarctic Shag (lower middle), and Weddel Seals (lower right)



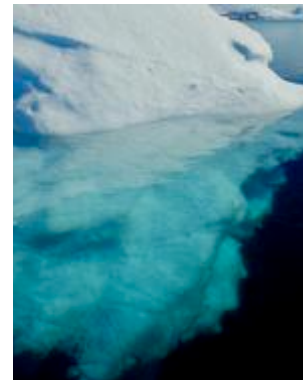
Cuerville Island, Antarctic Peninsula – Gentoo penguins at Cuerville Island (upper row),
Kayakers with penguins (lower left), and curious Gentoo penguins (lower right)



Neko Harbour, Antarctic Peninsula – Evening light (upper left and right),
Gentoo penguin carrying rock for potential partner (lower far left),
Gentoo penguins all in a row (lower mid left and right), and Small colony (lower far right)



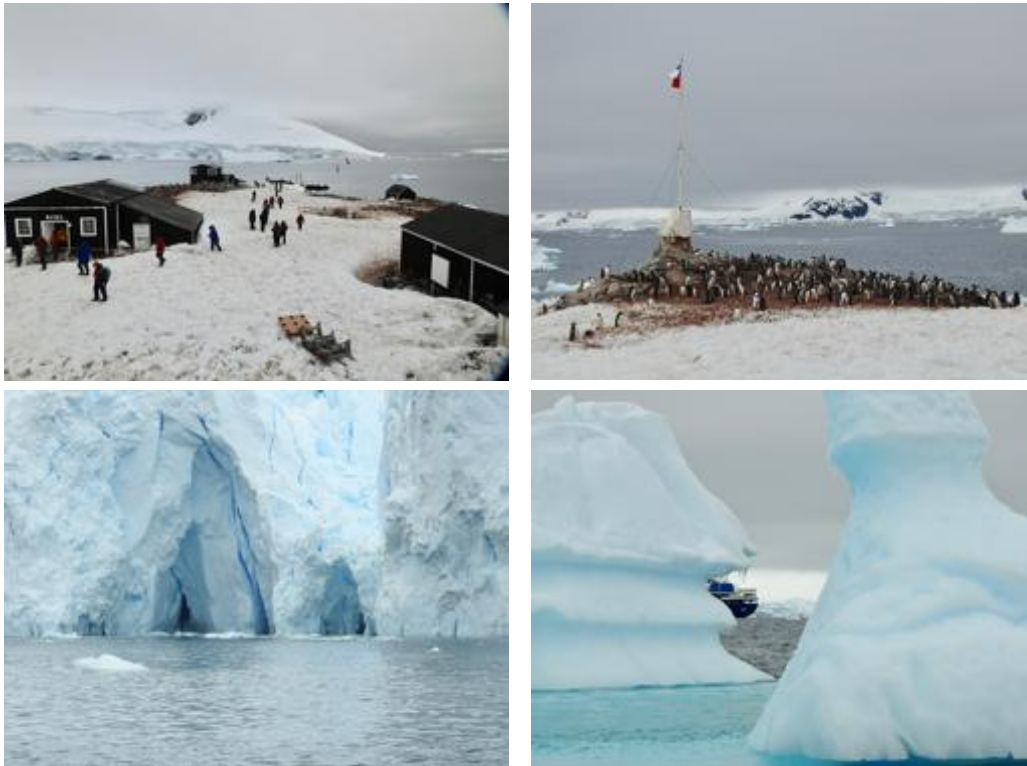
Neko Harbour, Antarctic Peninsula – BBQ on heli-deck (left), and Late evening light (right)



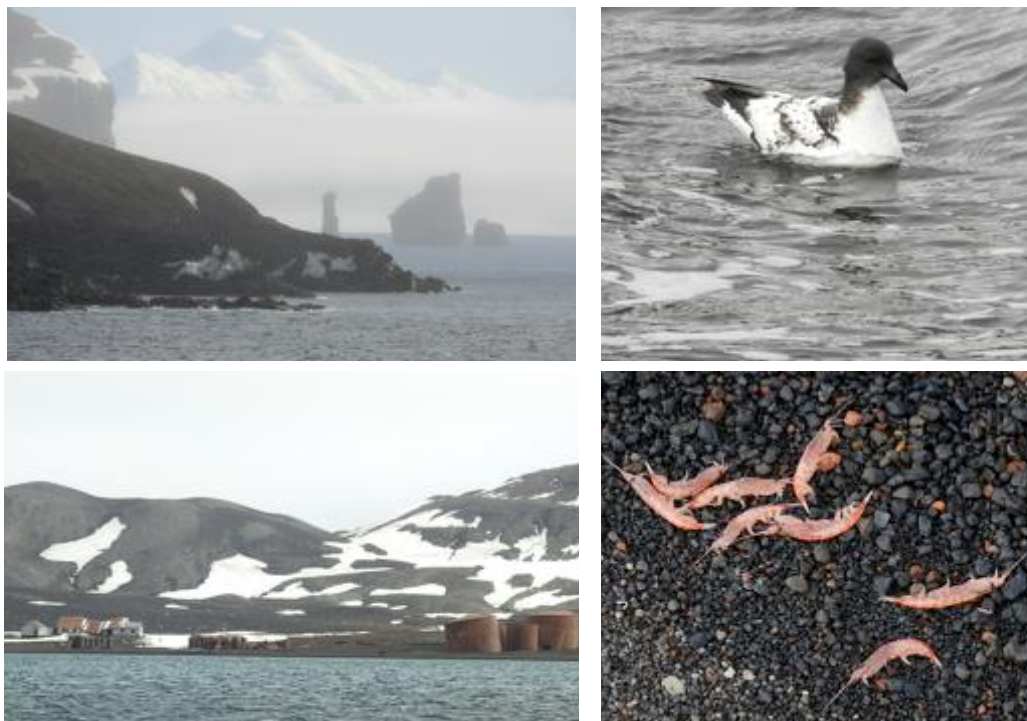
Port Lockroy (UK Antarctic Heritage base), Antarctic Peninsula –
 Port Lockroy on rocky point with ice sheet and mountains behind (upper left),
 Zodiac train to Port Lockroy (upper right),
 Gentoo penguin on nest with egg (lower far left), More Gentoo penguins (lower mid left),
 Antarctic Shag colony (lower mid right), and Underwater sea-ice colours (lower far right)



Neumayer Channel, Antarctic Peninsula – Approaching sunset (left), and Late evening light (right)



Gonzalez Videla (Chile) base, Antarctic Peninsula –
Buildings (upper left), Gentoo penguins around the flag pole with sea fog behind (upper right),
Glacial ice colours (lower left), and Melting ice sculptures with ship (lower right)



Deception Island, Antarctic Peninsula –
Entrance to Deception Island with peak of Livingston Island in background (upper left),
Cape Petrel (upper right), Whalers Bay with remains (lower left), Antarctic Krill (lower right)

We finish off 2019 with early Christmas with Alex and family in Sydney, followed by three days in the Blue Mountains to sample their Christmas fare. New Year will be back at Glengara before a few days on the farm near Orange with Anne's nephew Derek and partner Lisa where we will also cross paths with his elder son Pete and family, who will be visiting from Singapore.

With very best wishes for the Season

Anne and Dave