

Heaven loses its magic: **Gara Baldwin**

There was an ominous clunking noise. Our trusty Bedford Dormobile had carried us from London, through the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and Greece and now, outside a small town in northern Greece, it let us down.

We'd been told not to miss Meteora with its ancient monasteries perched on giant monolithic rocks. Arriving after the long drive from Athens, we found the small town of Kalambaka at the foot of the monoliths. We noticed a sign saying, 'Australian Bakery' as we drove up the winding road to tour the monasteries.

Our campsite was below the monasteries and as dusk fell we heard the monks chanting in the clear evening air. It was magical. We felt we were in heaven.

Morning brought the problem. After breakfast we prepared to leave the campsite. The Dormobile started, but with this worrying sound. We coaxed it along the narrow road into the town and with few English speakers around, we stopped at the Australian Bakery to ask where we could find a garage. We were directed to a grimy back lane and a friendly, but non-English speaking, mechanic. He inspected our car and in sign language let us know the problem was a wheel bearing, which would have to come from Athens, 350 kilometres away. It could take a few days.

Our campervan sat in the back lane for almost a week, with me, my husband, and seven year-old son living in it, the floor covered with newspapers to absorb greasy footprints, and using the mechanic's toilet.

It was a hot July and there was no shower, but we managed somehow. Each day we walked into town and explored. It was a quiet little place, with a few small businesses and men sitting outside cafes smoking and chatting most of the day.

At last the part arrived, the campervan was repaired and we drove out of town, in a direction we hadn't taken before. There, a couple of blocks away, was a big modern motel, with a swimming pool!

If only we'd walked that way days ago, we could have had a much more enjoyable, and cleaner, experience.

It was not the travel experience I'd been expecting.