

Who wants to travel? Colleen Russell

Ah, the quartz gibber plains near Tibooburra, a sight to behold; the early light turning the stones from turquoise through to yellows and browns, the charcoal shadows of the leopardwoods - miles of pebbly plains - uninterrupted, except for a few racing emus. Then, the contrast following heavy rains, a carpet of wildflowers.

At twilight vast flocks of galahs arrived at the watering hole where we were camped, slanting one way, all grey backs together, and then swirling the other, with the last of the day's sunlight glossy on their rosy bellies, like a living art-form.

But it wasn't quite the travel experience I thought it would be, sharing an uncomfortable, bouncy bus that belches black smoke, juddering over the gravel of unpaved roads, with a quarrel of old people, quavery in thought and body.

The silly old women, who question and cavil at each proposition, at each objective, gossiping amongst themselves about the men on board - their hair (or lack of it), their physiques, no longer proud and straight, weighed down by everyday problems, political affairs, terrorism and finances, and money. Of course, always money.

How wonderful their grandchildren are. If I hear another story of a son (or daughter) with wealth, breeding and business acumen, I will scream like a banshee in its death throes. We're never told of the weak-willed, the spendthrifts, the drunkards and the gamblers, are we?

By the way, my kids and grandkids have done quite well for themselves; leaders of industry with large mansions and limitless pocketbooks. Now my favourite pastime is just to sit, resting my old bones in the warmth of the sun like a shawl across my shoulders.

Travel! Who wants to travel? I would unravel. Not for me. Just leave me in peace on my verandah, with an icy tube, recalling my own adventures, listening to the birds, and staving off the inevitable.