



# **TIME TRAVELLER**

by  
**COLIN WOODCROFT**



## **About the Author**

Born in Grenfell in rural New South Wales in 1954, Colin Woodcroft moved to Sydney with his family at an early age. He still lives in Sydney and now resides in the Sutherland Shire. He is married and has three children.

Colin was a primary school teacher for thirty-five years and recently retired after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2005. He has travelled extensively, both in Australia and overseas and it was through his travels that an idea for writing a book initially came about. The book is not so much an autobiography, but more so a patchwork of events that have been part of Colin's life, mainly through travel with some thoughts and ideas tossed around.

The idea for the book came about one Friday afternoon while having a few drinks with long-time friend, Paul Dixon as he recalled some of his amusing holiday adventures. Paul suggested that there were many stories to be told and that they should be in a book.

Time Traveller is Colin's first published book.

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\*\* Cover design by my wife, Mali Woodcroft



## TIME TRAVELLER

One Sunday night, not so long ago I sat down to write this book. However when I dropped into my oversized computer chair and sat staring at the screen, I knew this was something I wanted to do- but I didn't really know how to do it or more importantly, what would I write about. I had some vague idea of telling a story of my travels, about interesting or unusual events or characters I have met along the way, or even places I would recommend one to visit. But what wasn't clear that Sunday night, not so long ago, was what sort of a book was I attempting to produce and for whom? I knew that I wasn't out to produce a single traveller's 'Lonely Planet', or a travel guide or even a history/ information book on places I had been to visit.

Why? Well I simply didn't feel equipped to create such books. I hadn't been to enough places and didn't have enough knowledge or know the history of lands I have visited. Imagine reading my travel guide with such gems as:

Greece- a wonderful eastern European country on the Aegean or is it the Adriatic or the Mediterranean, with lots of spectacular islands, but I have nothing to tell the reader about most of them because I have only been to two!

Oh and the food, yes, yummy, yummy, yummy but what do you call the meal with stuffed capsicum or the mince dish or the sweet cakes?

And accommodation- yes the three star hotel we stayed in Santorini was pretty good- so the back packers and the 5 star luxury boys stop reading now 'cause there's nothing for you here'. No this would be totally unsatisfactory!

So then what sort of a book was I aiming for?

Funny- well I'm no great humourist and friends don't just hear my name and go: "Oh yeah he's a real funny guy. He always got a few good stories and he always makes us laugh." It's more like "Oh yeah he would be pretty funny if he could remember what he is talking about." Funny? Definitely not!

A hot, sexy novel? That sounds good but involved in my travels- not a hot sexy novel! There were often some lovely ladies along the way, but the purpose of this exercise is not to talk about the gorgeous ladies I met - well not specifically, anyway.

No I think this book will have a common theme about travel throughout, but whatever else comes up, well we will wait and see. So strap your seatbelts on and come for the ride.

## ONE

I was born in a small country town called Grenfell on the western slopes of New South Wales. Grenfell, at one time, was a thriving little rural metropolis, like so many towns in New South Wales being a service centre for the numerous wheat and sheep properties in the surrounding districts. But now it is struggling along with so many other inland country centres. Grenfell is situated on the foot of the Weddin Mountains, 370 kilometres from Sydney with Cowra being east of it, while Forbes is west along the Mid-Western Highway. The areas around Forbes and Grenfell were renowned for harbouring one of our infamous bushrangers, Ben Hall, who was said to roam around the district. The town's most famous son was the great Australian bush poet and writer, Henry Lawson who was born on the goldfields of Grenfell in 1867.

Other notable people born in Grenfell, (apart from myself of course), include sixties tennis player, Jan Lehane (O'Neill), who reached the semi-finals of the Australian Championships (later to become the Australian Open) on four consecutive years (1960-63), only to be beaten each time by Margaret Court. For several years she was ranked in the world's top ten! She had a similar experience in the women's doubles finals again losing both times to pairs including Margaret Court! Boy, she must have been sick of the sight of her.

Stan McCabe, an Australian cricketer who played 39 test matches for Australia was another born in Grenfell, in 1910. In 1933 he became the Australian vice- captain. He retired with a very respectable test batting average of 48.21. Sir Donald Bradman referred to him as 'one of the great batsmen of the game.' International cyclist, Reggie McNamara was another born in Grenfell. McNamara set a number of world records in distances from one to twenty five miles. He was known as the Ironman throughout his career due to the number of times he was injured.

So it seems that I, being born in Grenfell have quite a standard to maintain. Wealth – there was plenty of gold being discovered near Grenfell in the 1860s and 1870s. Then there is the Bushrangers who could quickly relieve one of their wealth; the poet/storyteller who could have a story to help ‘educate’ and then there were the successful sportsmen/women challengers across a variety of sports. Yes it seems I was born in a pretty interesting town. Grenfell- once a thriving town in the Goldfields is now a quiet country town of about 2000 inhabitants.

There are a couple of interesting facts about the township of Grenfell:

1) during the 1860s the surrounding goldfields were producing large amounts of gold and consequently the population at one stage was reportedly about 20 000. Being a hot, dry area over the summer, the town boasted 25 pubs at its peak!

2) The town was originally called Emu Creek, but was gazetted Grenfell, after a former gold commissioner, John Granville Grenfell, who at that time was driving a coach and refused to stop for bushrangers despite being shot twice.

My first adventures in travelling began just after I was born. My parents had moved the family out to Grenfell as my father was an ambulance driver who was appointed to the town. However most of our extended family lived in the city so regular trips over the Blue Mountains was the norm. In those days it wasn’t quite a danger to cross the mountains, but it was a little like an adventure to travel to and from the city. Baby car seats were still to be created so it was more like mum holding the bassinet. In my short stay in Grenfell, I did have several trips to the city and back, often crossing the mountains, in rather icy conditions.

When I was two years old my father transferred to Randwick Ambulance station and so we made the trek to the big smoke to live. We moved to Sydney and we lived in part of my grandmother’s house in Bondi Junction (which has now been renamed Queens Park). The

house was divided into roughly two parts- one for my grandmother and the other part for my family.

My brother and I actually shared the front part of the garage. We had a concrete floor covered partially with a thin rug. Although we had to come down to the house for meals and to use the bathroom, life was pretty good for two young boys growing up in the eastern suburbs. We could turn the light off when we felt like it, but our real joy was spending countless hours huddled next to the large radiogram, straining our ears as we picked up radio frequencies of radio stations all across the country. We would write down what songs and commercials were played while we listened, then we would send the information to the radio station and in turn they would send us a special certificate to acknowledge that we were listening to them. Imagine the excitement when we received these. I remember listening to 2NX at Cooma, 5AD in Adelaide and 2HD in Newcastle. In those days of course there were no computers and no internet so 'picking up' a radio broadcast 'live' was a big thrill. Sometimes we would hear our favourite disc jockeys from a distant radio station and we loved finding new songs from stations other than the Sydney ones.

Growing up in Sydney's eastern suburbs was a lot of fun for an energetic and lively young boy. Most weekdays we would roam the streets of our area, playing anything from cowboys and Indians, to Japanese Shin taro, hidings or footy and cricket. Just at the bottom of our street was a gully where we used to play or just hang-out. Across the road was Queens Park which provided us with wide open space to race around in and up the top were some interesting caves to explore.

Saturday morning was footy during the winter months either at Queens Park or Centennial Park. The winter afternoons were usually trips out to the Sydney Cricket Ground for the 'match of the day', where my mates and I would roam the Paddington Hill where we would collect beer glasses from the men drinking and then return

them to the bar area for a small refund. This would keep us financial for a while. We also used to go to the Sydney Sports ground and watch my team in those days- the Eastern Suburbs Tricolours. I remember the 1966 season when Easts did not win a game! Yet I would be out there cheering then, week after week. When the footy season was finished Saturday afternoons were regularly spent in the great areas of Centennial Park. Our favourite activity was running through the drains- big concrete drains. We would often play 'hidings' or chasing games and we would be amused for many hours on long summer Saturday afternoons. When the sun started to drop in the sky we knew it was then time to head back home.

Another childhood memory that put fear into me was my time in the Cub Scouts. I loved being in the cubs and delighted in playing the games and participating in the many and varied activities. I was really proud of my cub shirt with the many cloth badges I had earned. However, my father, an ambulance officer did a lot of shift work and my mother was unable to drive, so on many cubs' nights I had to get to and from the Cub Scout hall by myself. I'll tell you here and now it was pretty scary for an 8 or 9 year old to race home in the dark with the streets full of those densely foliated trees, creating shadows and dancing to the wind blowing through them. My imagination on those windy nights would create some wonderfully interesting monsters dancing around the Queens Park area of Bondi Junction.

My grandmother was getting on in years but used to spend quite a bit of time travelling. I remember when she did a round the world Women's Weekly trip. She travelled for months and I think probably got a few fellow travellers offside, as her health, according to her was not that great and she liked to let others know about it. But what was great about her trip was the amount of souvenirs she would bring back for us, the grandkids. When the suitcases came out we would gather like bees to the honey pot, waiting to see what we were going to get. And she had plenty. She would pull out costume dolls from every

country- the English Grenadier Guards, the Spanish Flamenco Girl, the Hawaiian girl, the Austrian Yodeller, the Swiss Cowgirl and the Dutch in the wooden clogs. Then there were different souvenir hats, necklaces, bracelets, model cars, toy drums and other wonderful trinkets that young wide eyed grandchildren would feast their eyes on. We would greedily gather our new belongings and admire and treasure these souvenirs for a while until we hoped there was another trip coming up soon.

Living in my grandmother's house, up in the garage with my brother didn't feel weird- it was simply the way it was. The only drawback that I remember was that the only television in the house was the one in my grandmother's lounge room and we didn't have free access to it. As a 9 or 10 year old boy I did feel like I was missing out a little, with us not having our own television when friends would talk about episodes of Rawhide, Leave it to Beaver, Wagon Train and the Patty Duke Show. My main recollection of television shows was the ABC's Four Corners- not exactly riveting for a nine year old boy! Anyway it wasn't too long after that my father took a promotion to become the station officer at Summer Hill and along with that came a television.

While living at my grandmother's we had our first family holidays. The popular destinations for families in the eastern suburbs (well families we knew anyway) in the sixties was the Central Coast. We had holidays at Toukley, The Entrance, Long Jetty and Bateau Bay just to name a few, but I remember they were always fun. We would often stay near families from our suburb, with boys the same age as me, as we were footy team mates back at home. What do I remember from those early holidays? There was prawning, blocked toilets, Putt-Putt Golf and the long summer days. We would book a holiday house in one of the above mentioned holiday areas and spend a week or two there. At Long Jetty I was first introduced to prawning. It was great fun when we took out a prawn net, bucket and lantern and then wade out in the shallows and try capturing the prawns as they would dart between our legs trying to

avoid the net. We would spend an hour or two wading in often quite cold conditions but this was the school holidays so we would never consider complaining- and there was no better feeling than coming in with a bucket load of freshly caught prawns!

As part of our summer holiday it was not unusual to get a blocked toilet in the rented house. While we played around the new accommodation for two weeks we would see mum and dad trudging off to the local realty to get the blockage unblocked!

Putt-putt was always a highlight of any holiday. Most coastal towns had a putt-putt somewhere in the town where we able to pit our skills against the challenging and sometimes just about impossible holes. By the end of the holiday we were usually fairly skilled in this novelty golf putting as we had worked out all the angles. The putt-putt was a young boy's dream to complete the day before heading back to the holiday house.

The long, hot summer days were always a treat for us- the kids as the days would roll by with us spending hours playing in the water and sand and of course contributing to the chance of skin cancer. Being a fair skinned family, we took some bad sunburn while enjoying the carefree days at the beach or local pool. We simply didn't know any better. To us it was a case of turning our skin red and then during the week watching it peel and then do the same the next weekend.

Another one of the early family holidays I remember was our driving trip to the snow. However the trip was to the snow, not TO THE SNOW! By this I mean there were some snow- patches of it, but we didn't venture to the resorts where the whole mountain was covered in snow. We headed down the Hume Highway in the EK Holden, with the pink fins, stopping at the famous 'dog on the Tuckerbox' nine mile from Gundagai. This was virtually a compulsory stop for all families heading south from Sydney. You had to wait your turn for the obligatory family photo surrounding the little dog on his tuckerbox.

Surely every family whoever travelled south along the Hume would have the Kodak Instamatic snapshot of that famous little dog. From here the journey continued down the Hume Highway, passing Lake George- a lake which seems to 'disappear' from time to time. The lake, which runs along the eastern side of the Federal Highway, seems to empty and fill of its own volition. The large body of water rises and falls seemingly mysteriously throughout history. My dad, like many others used to delight at telling this tale as we drove past the lake heading towards Canberra. After good falls of rain it still looks a normal lake, but when you travel through drier times there will be stacks of cattle grazing. It certainly is one unusual lake.

After passing Lake George we continued southwards coming into the nation's capital city of Canberra. Canberra is a totally different city to someone coming from Sydney. While Canberra is designed and planned, Sydney was pretty well just thrown together in the early days of the first white settlement in Australia. Sydney has the main street of George Street running north to south with some skinny narrow lanes and streets radiating from the main street. Canberra, with its large sweeping roundabouts, wide streets, bike lanes and open garden areas can give the impression to the 'uninformed' that it is a rather soul-less city without the heart of the other capitals. This impression is further developed due to the city centre being rather subdued outside business hours. However, like most cities you have to know where to go to really get to understand and enjoy it.

After leaving Canberra we headed south, passing Cooma and reaching into snow country. By winding the window down in the car we would get the first feelings of the snow country. As we entered the Snowy Mountains region we saw a change in the landscape. Littered on both sides of the road are giant grey rocks, some 2 or 3 metres high. These rocks dominate the landscape and help give the impression of cold and snowy weather. As we drove closer to the ski resorts of Thredbo and Perisher we saw our first real snow! There were only patches of it, but

there was no mistaking it we were looking at real snow! We drove on a little further and then we came across a little creek with patches of snow scattered about. "Stop the car! There's real snow to deal with." We piled out of the car and carefully made our way down to the snow. Instantly my brother and I were turned into warriors and attacked each other with vigour. 'Take that Phil!' I shouted as a snowball whizzed past his head. The returned volley came rapidly narrowly missing a hit. The snow zeroed back and forth in the Battle of the Snow with occasional bursts being thrust from the sides via mum, dad or my sister, Heather. We were delighted frolicking in the snow (what there was of it). After the snow battle and several failed attempts at building a snowman we headed to the car to push a little closer to the snowfields.

As we all piled back into the car there were several realisations that became apparent to me. They were: 1. The snow looks good, but in actual fact it is just damn cold and it stings your fingers. 2. Building a snowman like you see on TV takes a bit more skill and time and 3. The snowy landscape looks romantic and picturesque, but really it just makes you cold! So the journey continued a little further (to Sawpit Creek I think) until the orange snow poles were along the road and we were getting close to where snow chains may have been needed. So our adventure into the high country came to an end as we reluctantly turned around and headed north back to Cooma – our destination for the night.

Our holiday continued after Cooma up through the Kosciusko National Park visiting places such as Kiandra and Talbingo. Several more stops around the Southern Highlands completed our first foray into the Alpine or snow country. I became 'hooked' on skiing and had quite a few other holidays in the snow, but I must admit I always struggle with the cold weather. Give me a nice sunny day on the slopes anytime and I will always be happy. Blizzard or windy conditions and I become the hot chocolate with marshmallows and a Mars Bar fiend lurking around the warmth of the cafes and food outlets.

## TWO

Holidays were a regular occurrence for my family. We had family holidays most years and they were always with us travelling in the car. My older sister didn't go on many holidays with the family, at least not ones that I remember. She had stayed at my grandmother's when our family moved out to Summer Hill, when my father was given a promotion. Wendy, my older sister completed her high schooling at Sydney Girls High and then attended Alexander Mackie Teachers' College at Paddington. She was appointed to Randwick Primary School. After she finished school she had contacted some of her former classmates in Grenfell and then she decided to transfer up to Grenfell to work. After returning to Grenfell she met and married a farmer from Grenfell and they moved to a farm about 20 miles out of town. This was a big move for her as basically she is a fairly sociable woman who enjoys most cultural activities. She joined the musical and dramatic groups in town, so she then did quite a deal of travelling back and forth from the township to the farm. She and her husband drifted apart due to differing interests and after they divorced she left the area and I guess my connection, at least physical connection with my home town of Grenfell was no longer there. After leaving Grenfell she moved to Bathurst, about two and a half hours west of Sydney. This now gave us a new destination to visit.

Another early holiday of the family was a caravan trip to Melbourne. This trip was a big deal as this was going to be my first trip interstate. I don't really know where the idea of a caravan trip came from because we weren't really caravan travellers. In fact this was our one and only ever holiday where we towed a caravan. I think the story goes like this: My father worked with a bloke who owned a caravan and he said that we could borrow it to take on our holidays. My father thought it sounded a good idea especially as the bloke who owned it said it was easy to tow and on top of that he lent it to us for a cheap price. How