

Ian Hughes

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# Across the Wide Brown Land

South Australia 2008



# Preface

There is, as mentioned elsewhere, a body of opinion (voiced, among others, by the *Dragon Lady Who Used To Operate Out Of The Other End Of I Block*) to the effect that *Hughesy* is, if not travel-averse, at least travel-reluctant.

This might be seen as a fair conclusion based on the fact that for several years after we'd finished constructing the **Little House of Concrete** was complete, *Hughesy* didn't engage in significant travel activities until *'Er Indoors* appeared on the scene.

However, the travel-hiatus resulted from economic factors rather than an inbuilt aversion to travel *per se*.

The same financial considerations had, before the construction of the **Little House of Concrete** meant once *Hughesy's* assorted cricket-related Odysseys were out of the way for the year there wasn't a great deal of cash available for anything above subsistence-level eating and drinking.

Then, in the run-in to retirement when we sat down and looked at the figures, it became evident that my allocated pension would suffice for day to day expenses, but that would be about as far as the money was likely to go.

As a result, travel planning, choices of destination, activities along the way and such were matters for *'Er Indoors* since she'd be the one paying for each little jaunt.

Bearing those financial constraints in mind, we've done reasonably well over the past seven years with trips to destinations along the **Queensland coast**, the **Hunter Valley**, to **Melbourne**, around the **Yarra Valley** and up to **north-east Victoria**, down to **northern Tasmania** and, most recently, **Japan**.

There's also been the opportunity to catch the **2001 Byron Bay Blues & Roots Festival** and last year's **Eric Clapton** concert in **Brisbane**.

So I'm happy to sit in the **Little House of Concrete** and pass the time reading, writing, listening to music, drinking wine and doing some gardening on the side.

On the other hand, if *Madam* appears beside my right elbow inquiring whether I'd be interested in a trip to **South Australia**, the answer is almost sure to be in the affirmative.

A cynic would point out that many of the destinations have been wine-producing areas and *Hughesy* would hardly be likely to refuse the chance to indulge in a spot of tasting.

And the cynic would be quite right.

Once *Madam* has set out the basic parameters (destination, length of stay, et cetera) *Hughesy* does get the opportunity to do some planning of his own to fit in with his interests.

Still, the primary thrust of the journey is mostly beyond my control.

Given a basic itinerary that allowed for seven nights in South Oz, there's no way we'd be able to go everywhere.

Once we've narrowed the possibilities down to a couple of areas the number of places we could go will always be greater than the number of locations it's physically possible to visit.

When wine tasting is involved experience suggests visiting more than half a dozen wineries at well-spaced intervals through the day is likely to result in severe palate burnout.

I could, of course, learn to spit, removing the inebriation factor from the equation, but the increase in the number of wineries that could be visited wouldn't be worth the raised risk of domestic discord.

So, with seven nights at our disposal, the first decision to be made was which of **Adelaide**'s environs we'd be visiting this time.

Based on her previous residence in **Croweater Country**, *'Er Indoors* suggested **Clare** as a desirable destination and the suggestion was one that a dedicated *Riesling* drinker could comfortably endorse.

Since we're not very likely to be back that way unless we're stopping over on the way to somewhere else a basic structure of **Adelaide > three nights in Clare > the Barossa overnight** on the way back to the **City of Churches** seemed to fit reasonably well.

That meant four nights in the wine country and three days for *Madam* to catch up with friends and acquaintances. Looked like a fair deal all around.

With the basic outline of the trip sorted out, it was time to set out on basic research.

When you're researching Australian wineries, there are few better starting points than *James Halliday's Australian Wine Companion*.

If you've spotted *Mr Halliday's* weighty tome in a bookshop, you may well suppose it contains details of every winery on the continent.

I guess that, at some point, it did.

The recent growth of Australia's wine industry has, however, posed a problem for *Halliday*.

There are now too many wineries to fit into a book limited to eight-hundred-odd pages, and they produce more wines than any one person can physically taste.

There's also the question of tasting notes for previous vintages, so a dedicated drinker could well end up with a shelf full of **Hallidays** for reference purposes.

The combination of those factors induced me to subscribe to the online version of Halliday's tome.

Having worked my way around the website a couple of times, I might have bought my last hard copy of the **Companion**.

Mind you, I did use the hard copy to *start* research into the wineries of the **Clare Valley**.

The process started with a basic list of what was there from the handy list at the back of the book.

It delivered star ratings and an indication of whether an establishments was open to the public.

That data went onto a spreadsheet.

Name of the winery, Halliday's star rating, a blank column for the address, another for details of opening hours and a final column for anything of interest.

With that done, it was over to the **Companion** website for a dash of cut and paste.

Physical and website addresses, opening hours and anything of interest went into the appropriate columns,

Anywhere that hadn't made it into the print version got slotted into alphabetical order.

So, voila, I had a neat summary of the **wineries of the Clare Valley**.

Since we were only planning to spend a day in the **Barossa**, there was no point in repeating the whole laborious exercise there.

For the next bit, I wandered over to the front of the book and the list of the highest-rated wineries.

Then I went through the same process, carefully deleting any that were not open to the public.

The remaining list still contained too many places for us to visit in a day.

But if you're only going to be able to visit a couple of wineries out of a multitude of competing establishments you may as well head for a couple of the very best.

Having done that, it was another cut and paste job as I checked each winery's website and anything of note added to the summary column.

Research complete, the contents of the spreadsheet were pasted into a plain text document.

I cut that into individual slices to cover all the wineries along with accommodation details.

That done, it was a case of plug in the *iPod*, create three folders called **Clare**, **Barossa** and **Adelaide**, transfer the files from the desktop to the appropriate folder and drag the folders over to the *iPod* .

The result was a handy pocket reference for the trip.

# Getting There

## Saturday 1 November

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Part of the theory behind the research was the need to fill in the time between finishing packing (approximately ten in the morning with a few last-minute items to be added once the clothesline had done its job) and the arrival of the **Bowen Transit Airport Shuttle**

When the shuttle turned up on schedule around 3:45 for a 6:30 departure from **Whitsunday Coast** it looked like there were only the two of us on board but checking at **Bowen Travel** produced a third paying customer.

We'd spent several years without a bus connection between **Bowen** and the airport, and the service has only resumed relatively recently.

Hopefully, the numbers on board reflected the fact that we were leaving town on Festival Saturday rather than lack of demand.

*Your front door > airport > front door* seems a much better option than leaving the car at the airport while you're away.

As far as the exact details of the journey are concerned, there's not much to say.

A change of seat to avoid the afternoon sun allowed me to avoid the Christian radio over the speakers.

An announcement at the airport alerted us to a remarkable fact.

A **Jetstar** flight was, for once, running ahead of time.

That unexpected occurrence was more than countered by the fact that the **Gold Coast Airport shuttle** was running more than three-quarters of an hour late

Flights from **Whitsunday Coast** usually depart in mid- to late afternoon rather than the early evening.

So we weren't quite anticipating that the food outlets around the **Baggage Claim** area were universally closed.

That, in turn, meant that the advertised *thirty-five minutes wait* for the shuttle wasn't spent indoors, sitting down.

Instead, we stood around outside the terminal, watching the off-duty airport staff wander off homewards while we scanned the horizon for the shuttle.

Fortunately, once aboard, the journey to **Southport** was straightforward and uneventful.

But it was still well after ten-thirty when we alighted in front of the unit which would be our base for the next forty hours.

Given the lateness of the hour, we took a rain-check on eating and crashed, figuring that skipping a meal after a substantial breakfast and a late lunch probably wouldn't prove fatal.



## Sunday 2 November

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Eight-thirty the following morning found the two of us tucking into the *Big Breakfast* (Yours Truly) and *Eggs Benedict* ('Er Indoors) at the cafe down the street from the unit.

That timing meant we could hotfoot it back to base for ***Insiders*** on ABC1 since we needed the latest analysis of the forthcoming Presidential election.

The 10:30 variant (***Offsiders***) was just as important. Significant financial matters would be under consideration.

Every four years on the **first Tuesday in November**, the world watches while citizens of the **United States** bring a long, expensive process of elimination to a conclusion.

Every year, most of Australia's population spend the **first Tuesday in November** watching the outcome of a different long, expensive process of elimination.

That one sends a field of twenty-four racehorses out around a figure nine in reverse around **Flemington racecourse** in the Melbourne Cup.

I was a sporadic watcher of ***Offsiders*** until a chance encounter with their Cup preview yielded the trifecta in 2005.

Following the discussion on the program, I concluded that while many people like *Pop Rock*, in my own opinion *Delta Blues Maybe Better*.

That combination boxed in the trifecta returned \$1100 thank you very much.

A sizeable chunk of the proceeds was invested in the wine fridge.

Still, I suspect an annual investment of \$30 for a box four trifecta and the same horses in the quinella means, for my remaining lifespan, *Hughesy's* once a year punt will be carried out using their money.

And, yes, I do realise that an \$1100 trifecta doesn't go anywhere near replacing the departed dosh from a mostly disastrous twenty years on the punt up to **Anzac Day 1995**.



For the record, from the **Offsiders** discussion, I decided a *Mad Rush* of *Barbaricus* could well be the *Nom Du Jeu*, but if it didn't turn out that way *C'est La Guerre*.

*C'est La Guerre* was always likely to figure in calculations given it was the less fancied of the Lloyd Williams-owned runners.

On top of that, of course, **Fred Dagg** once rendered the phrase *C'est magnifique mais ce n'est pas la guerre* as *It's magnificent, but it's not the railway station*.

On that basis the nag in question was akeways going to enter calcultions. And I thought the other three fitted together nicely.

Anyway, once the Cup selections had been worked out, the rest of the day could be spent reading the ***Weekend Australian***.

After a quick lap around **Australia Fair** shopping centre to obtain provisions, I took a phone call from my brother to discuss issues relating to the unit and other elements of my late father's will.

Five-thirty found me engaged in dinner preparations so that I could get my fix of ***The Einstein Factor*** at half six and while away the time between the seven o'clock ABCTV news.

We followed that with the final instalment of ***The First Australians*** on **SBS** at eight-thirty before a slightly later than usual stagger into the cot.

I was working on the principle that a late rise the next day would help fill in the waiting time before it was time to head towards **Adelaide** via **Coolangatta Airport**.

## Monday 3 November

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The attempt to fool *Hughesy's* body clock was unsuccessful.

Despite attempts to roll over and resume slumber by six, I was out of bed and working on the first instalment of the current narrative.

Those efforts were interrupted by *Madam's* arrival in the living room.

That was immediately followed by a set of instructions that sent me off on errands which filled in the waiting time in a manner which mere slumber would never have been able to match.

Having scanned the options to get us to **Coolangatta Airport**, we ended up choosing the **700** bus to **Tweed Heads**.

We alighted at the airport turnoff and, after a few minutes of slight confusion, caught the shuttle that operates between the highway and the terminal.

Confusion can be attributed to the fact that the last time we flew out of **Coolangatta** in **December 2006** check in closed before the shuttle started.



As a result, we had to hoof it through occasional drizzle over 715 metres from the bus stop to the terminal.

The trauma associated with that incident can be judged by the fact that I had blotted the whole affair out of my memory.

So I'd forgotten both the existence of the shuttle bus and the extreme ordinariness of the interior of **Coolangatta Airport's** domestic terminal.

I'm not pretending to be a connoisseur of airport terminals, although I have seen a few

For a start, given the nature of the beast, I think it's reasonable to anticipate an airport terminal will, more than likely, be somewhat crowded.

But even in **Whitsunday Coast**, arguably the smallest and most cramped domestic terminal in Australia (if there's a worse one I hope I never come across it) you can at least stand in the sunshine and see the world that surrounds you.

Inside the terminal at **Coolangatta**, it's almost as crowded and you can see walls.

*Hughesy's appraisal of the place: On the extremely ordinary side of very ordinary.*

The sight that greeted us when we emerged from the air bridge two hours after leaving Queensland airspace was a complete contrast.

**Adelaide Airport** might not be the best airport in the world.

If it isn't, I hope our travel arrangements fluke us into some of the better ones.

Spacious with high ceilings and picture windows looking towards the Adelaide Hills, this one is everything that Coolangatta isn't.

*Hughesy's rating: On the stellar side of out of this world.*

With baggage claimed and hire car negotiations completed, finding our way to the accommodation couldn't have been more straightforward.

Turn left onto **Sir Donald Bradman Drive**, follow that as far as you can go and then turn right into **Seaview Road**.

It was after dark when we set out, and I was about to suggest we pull over and find a street number when I noticed the illuminated **Meleden Villa** sign.

Our upstairs room promised water views in the morning.

Advice about eating options saw us striding purposefully towards the traffic lights, which signalled the location of the restaurant precinct.

Eight-thirty on Monday night isn't the optimum time for an extensive appraisal of options.

We opted for Asian at **Red Rock**, one of several noodle-oriented establishments scattered around the city and across the nation, but we didn't know that at the time, did we?

And the hour was latish.

*Madam's pad thai* was a tad spicier than she would have preferred, but my *red beef curry* was excellent, as was the \$4.90 glass of *house Riesling* (from a bottle, not a cardboard box).

With those affairs dealt with, it was time to head back southwards to the cot in the attic at **Meleden Villa** for a good night's sleep before the real adventures began.



## South Australia 2008

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# Tuesday 4 November

We'd already decided the day's activities would kick off with a stroll around **Henley Beach** since our post-nightfall arrival had precluded sightseeing.

Down the road and just around the corner we passed the former headquarters of the **Australian Cricket Academy** before heading along the jetty for a look back down the coast towards **Glenelg**.

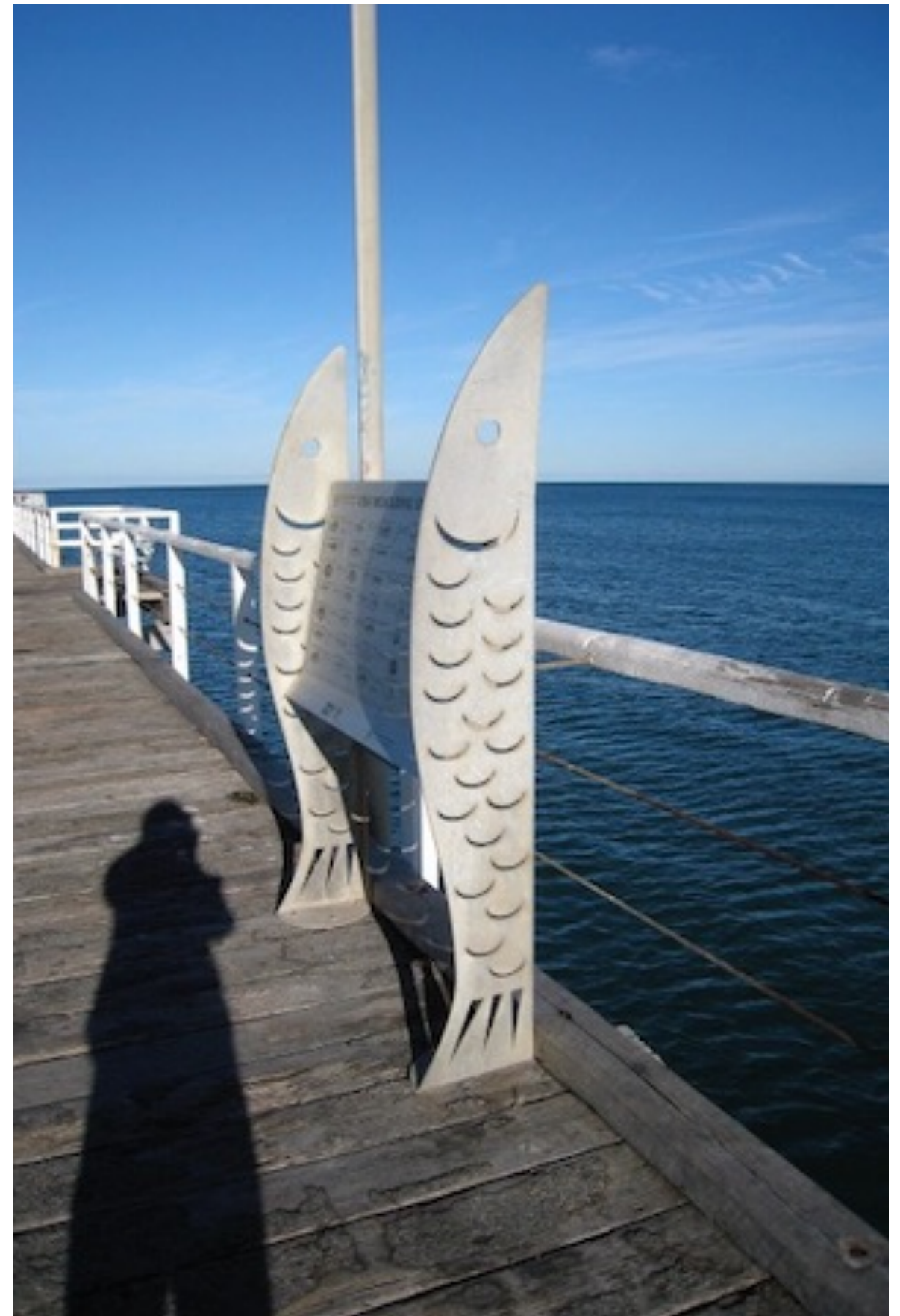
We headed back to base through the restaurant quarter, where *Madam* spotted **Stella**, where she'd hoped to dine the previous night.

Changes to flight schedules between the time we booked in April and our departure combined with Monday evening to put an end to that option.

I suppose we could have looked more carefully, but I didn't recall lights the night before, and *Madam* had forgotten the details of the name of the place (other than it started with S).









And there almost certainly will be a next time. There's plenty of **South Oz** left for *Hughesy* to explore.

**Meleden Villa** is conveniently located as far as late-arriving flights are concerned, but your mileage as far as the accommodation is concerned may vary.

Before booking *Madam* carries out extensive research, and she'd found that the place had attracted a variety of ratings.

That's understandable. It's not the place to go if you're looking for something brand spanking new that shines and sparkles. Some might also be put off by the lack of a cooked breakfast.

On the other hand, a request for advice on the best route to link up with the **Main North Road** to **Clare** produced the most explicit and best-directed mud map I can remember.

It came with instructions which turned out handy when we found ourselves surrounded by semi-trailers at a critical intersection without a road sign in sight.

As stated, opinions may vary, but we found the place comfortable, and I would have absolutely no hesitation about going back.

I see no point in looking further if we're after accommodation close to the airport on the way in or out of **Adelaide**.







After some excitement at that critical intersection, the journey was uneventful except for a slight incident involving alternative routes through and around **Gawler** and some road-works where the alternatives reunited.

Since we were just inside the limits of the street directory, we were able to backtrack without much trouble.

**Auburn** is located at the southern end of the Clare Valley.

We arrived there about eleven-thirty and found our base for the next three nights without much trouble.

We found the proprietress on site. That led to a guided tour of the facilities along with advice about the neighbourhood.

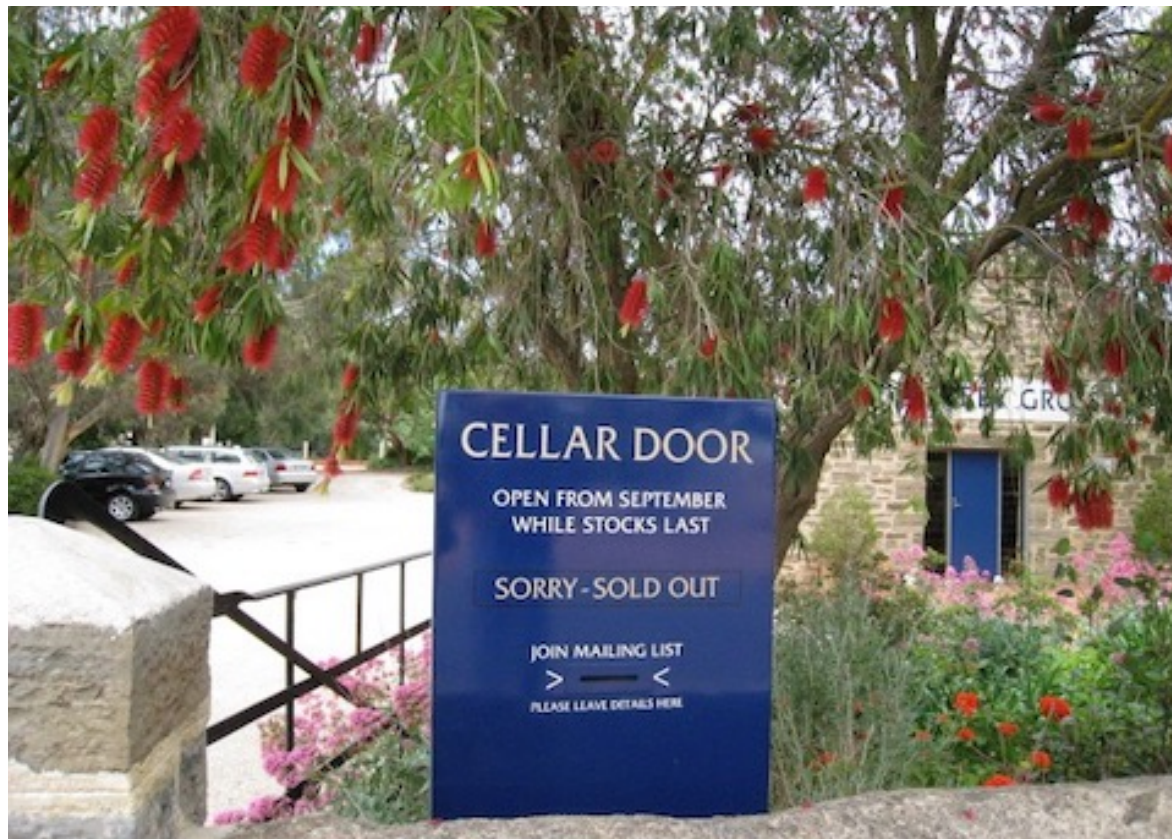
Working on the principle that Melbourne Cup Day might see places open 363 days a year (with Christmas and Good Friday being the exceptions) involved in some race-related function we started off with a stroll around Auburn.

That took us past a Cup function which might have attracted a number of the local proprietors.

Of the two wineries located in the town, Grosset (according to my *iPod* notes, Australia's leading Riesling maker) opens for approximately six weeks from early September until stocks are sold out.







I figure it's eight or nine weeks from early September to Cup Day, so it wasn't surprising to find the sign at the entrance suggesting we'd better come back in ten months if we wanted a taste.

Still, it was worth going for a look, and I was hoping that somewhere along the road we'd run across one of the wines at an eatery and, with a bit of luck, it'd be available by the glass.

I knew that the other winery in town (**Mount Horrocks**) was only open on weekends, but there's a cafe in the old Auburn railway station which I thought might just be open on Cup Day (wrong!)

Anyway, it lay on our way back to the centre of town, where we expected to find lunch.

Back in downtown Auburn, we found the cafe (Cygnets at Auburn) had gone racing, so it was a case of lunch at The Rising Sun pub.

Insufficient perusal of the menu resulted in disappointment for Someone who forgot advice to ignore anything described as schnitzel unless you're sure that it's freshly made.

My trio of sausages on a bed of mash with a red onion jelly filled the void nicely and provided a foundation of blotting paper that would become important once tasting started.







As previously intimated, Auburn lies at the southern end of a string of townships with Clare lying at the northern extremity.

So I'd planned a strategy that worked on covering the south end on the first day and going on to Clare and working south on the other two.

One day would include the eastern side of the Main North Road with a trip through Polish Hill River to Mintaro.

On the second day, I planned to work along the western side of the highway.

With that idea in mind, we started by heading off to **Taylors** which I figured would be less liable to be affected by Cup Fever.

As usual, the tasting room attendant offered us two glasses, and I explained since *Madam* was the designated driver one glass would be sufficient.

She would, however, be taking a sip if I identified something she might like.

Of the five ranges on offer, I ignored the *Promised Land* (\$13) and *80 Acres* (\$15).



Both are widely available and frequently discounted. Instead, I worked through the *Estate* (\$18), *Jaraman* (\$24.50 whites, \$29.50 reds) and *St Andrews* (\$35 whites, \$60 reds) ranges.

The whites were all good, with the *Riesling* offering everything you'd expect from quality *Clare Riesling*.

I particularly liked the *Estate Gewurztraminer* and the two *Chardonnays*.

But the reds were outstanding.

*Madam* was particularly taken with the *St Andrews Cabernet Sauvignon* which she liked more than a certain nameless, but quite pleasant drop we'd encountered at twice the price.

We don't get to try a lot of \$60 wines, but from our limited experience, the *St Andrews* reds punch well above their weight.

Back in the car, we headed past Eyre Creek (closed, as expected) towards **O'Leary Walker**, only to find it closed for renovations, which I guess have to be done some time.

So we moved on to **Mintaro Cellars** (closed, racing suspected) before deciding we might as well head back to base to catch the race.

As it turned out, we should have checked the starting time and turned on the TV in time for the end of the presentations.

At least it gave me some time to work on the trip diary before a stroll along a section of the **Riesling Trail**, a sauna for *Madam* and a light supper washed down with the complimentary bottle of *Annie's Lane Riesling* that was waiting for us on arrival.

**Lorem**

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## Wednesday 5 November

Once breakfast had been demolished, the first priority for the day involved meal arrangements for the next couple of days.

The briefing we'd received on arrival indicated supper requisites could be obtained from the highly-rated **Wild Saffron**.

We'd also been told that lunch at **Skillogalee** was a must-do.

So once I'd succeeded in booking us in for lunch on Thursday it was a case of setting out to locate **Wild Saffron** to check the options for the next two days' evening meals.

Those looked like being *lasagne* (highly recommended by our host) or *Thai beef salad*.

After a quick conference we decided to head off on the tasting trail and return after lunch (I'd pencilled in at **Salt 'n' Vines**), pick up dinner, drop it in **Auburn** and then head off on a loop through **Polish Hill River** and **Mintaro**.







Remembering we'd be flying home, the game plan was to try as many wineries as possible, add our details to the mailing lists (preferably the electronic version) and place orders once we returned to base.

At **Knappstein**, the Riesling was, predictably excellent.

The surprise package was *Three*, a blend of *Gewurztraminer*, *Riesling* and *Pinot Gris* which impressed *Madam* enough for her to invest in a bottle of the '05 from the bin-ends special barrel.

There's also a brewery on the premises, so I tried the lager and promptly picked up a four-pack, figuring I'd be able to knock those over some time over the next couple of days.

The second stop was **Leasingham**, which I'd planned to approach through the back streets until we heard much easier directions (turn left at the footy field).

We arrived to find that the tasting options were limited to four - *2007 Riesling* (\$23), *2008 Individual Vineyard Release Watervale Riesling* (\$46, limited quantities, maximum of three bottles per person), *2006 Magnus Cabernet* (\$17) and *2006 Classic Clare Shiraz* (\$55).

While the wines on offer were limited in number, the quality was stellar.



We ended up staying in the Tasting Room longer than expected due to a wide-ranging conversation with the guy looking after the operation.

Over forty minutes we covered everything from cellar construction and cellaring conditions to investment strategies in the current economic environment with side-tracks to cover each wine and a timely reference to the importance of taking notes when you're going tasting.

*Hughesy* doesn't get to wineries that often.

On the other hand, the guy at the cellar door has a range of wineries within reach and the opportunity to develop a thorough note-taking system.

I suspect he used a notebook rather than scribbled notes on whatever publicity material happens to be lying around the premises).

I hadn't quite progressed that far at this point in proceedings.

Following his suggestion, I tried to take notes at each of the places we visited.

Looking back over the accumulated materials as I type, the records vary wildly and don't always give an accurate summary of my reaction to the winery.

From here on, where there's a lengthy discussion it means that I'd ended up with plenty of notes.

I'm typing this a fortnight later from written notes compiled a day or two after we visited the winery in question.

In other cases, I took notes which then somehow got lost in the shuffle between the tour and the write up in the journal.

That said, my notes from **Leasingham** suggest my favourite of the four was the *Individual Vineyard Riesling*.

*Bin 7 Riesling* is one I'll be keeping my eye out for in bottle shops and restaurant wine lists, as is the *Magnus Cabernet* which is as good as you're likely to find at this price point.

I thought it represented excellent value for money.

Then, of course, there's the *2006 Classic Clare Shiraz* which made two wines in two days that we'd rated higher than the nameless, but quite pleasant hundred-plus dollar wine previously mentioned which we tend to use as a \$100-plus benchmark.

Up to this moment, the only other dry red in that price range we've been able to try was a *Grange* that's just a little too good to be used as a *punches above its weight* benchmark.



Highly impressed as we left **Leasingham** and headed south in search of lunch.

The next port of call was **Kirrihill Wines**, which houses **Salt 'n' Vines**, our preferred option though we hadn't booked.

**Kirrihill** is owned by the same interests as a company that manages a hefty chunk (1300 hectares) of South Australia's vineyards.

That would, one suspects, have certain advantages when it comes to sourcing quality grapes for your wines.

The Cellar Door had an informative attendant, and we were her only customers for most of our stay, so we benefited from detailed information about the wines on offer.

That was handy since there were three ranges available for tasting.

The \$15 *Companions* range blends Clare Valley and Adelaide Hills fruit except for *2008 Clare Valley Rose*.

We also sampled the \$20-\$25 *Single Vineyard Series* and \$29 *Kirrihill Estates 2004 Clare Valley Riesling*, a five-star wine which appears in my notes with a single word (*Buy*) beside it.

So we did. There was half a dozen waiting for us at the Post Office when we got home.

Of the Companions, the *2008 CV/AH Riesling Pinot Gris*, *2006 CV/AH Cabernet Merlot* and *2007 AH/CV Tempranillo Garnacha* were particularly memorable.

However, everything on offer was much more than merely acceptable.

At the price point, the *Single Vineyard Series* was outstanding with my preference going to *2008 Pinot Noir Rose Brut*, *2008 Watervale Riesling* and *2006 Clare Valley Baile An Gharrai Shiraz*.

Having tasted close to the entire range, the prospect of a break over lunch had definite appeal, so we headed upstairs to **Salt 'n' Vines**.

My *Trio of Game Meats* and *Madam's Smoked Atlantic Salmon* would have gone down nicely with a glass of something other than water.

But She was driving, and I was temporarily tasted out.

Which was an important consideration.



I was particularly looking forward to our next stops in the **Polish Hill River** sub-region.

With lunch out of the way (and exceptionally delish it was), the plan was to backtrack to **Wild Saffron** and pick up something for dinner for the next two nights.

We'd follow that with a flying visit to base camp to put the tucker in the fridge before setting out to taste some more.

Arriving at **Wild Saffron**, the *lasagne* wasn't available until after four.

And the package would (so we were told) feed four (which was probably two too many), so we opted for a couple of *Thai beef salads* from the fridge.

A few years ago our local bottle shop had discounted stocks of the **Paulett** *Polish Hill River Riesling*, most of which found their way to the **Little House of Concrete**.

They had renewed my long-standing interest in *Riesling*, so I was looking forward to a visit and taste.

Apart from a five-star rating from Mr Halliday, the note on the *iPod* mentioned *magnificent views across the Polish Hill River region*,







As we pulled into the car park and looked across the countryside, words like *gob-smacked* sprang to mind.

The tasting notes I scribbled while I was there disappeared somewhere along the track. The publicity material that remained on hand might have provided an opportunity to cheat a bit and reconstruct from memory.

Internet access could have fleshed that material out into something resembling an authentic review.

But an eight or nine-day gap before I'd be able to use that line of inquiry means it's probably best to state that I was highly impressed (once again) and leave it at that. I had the same problem just down the road at **Pikes**.

The wines were impressive, the mailing list subscribed to, and exact details regarding specific wines are hazy.

In particular, visiting the two establishments leaves me in awe of people who can taste large numbers of wines in a sitting and still maintain the ability to distinguish subtle differences between high-class examples of the same style.

Given an array of *Rieslings* and a fresh palate, I'd be able to work my way around to identifying one particular wine as the pick of the bunch, but it would take some time.







Once the task had been accomplished, palate burnout would make it difficult to repeat the exercise, even after a couple of hours' break on, say, a range of *Cabernets*.

An overwhelmed, temporarily burnt out palate accounts for my relatively lukewarm response to the wines we tasted at the final stop, **Reilly's** in **Mintaro**.

Again, I'm forced to skip over details after indicating everything was impressive, with great examples of dry-grown wines on offer.

After a short ramble around downtown **Mintaro**, we headed around for a non-tasting tour of the countryside.

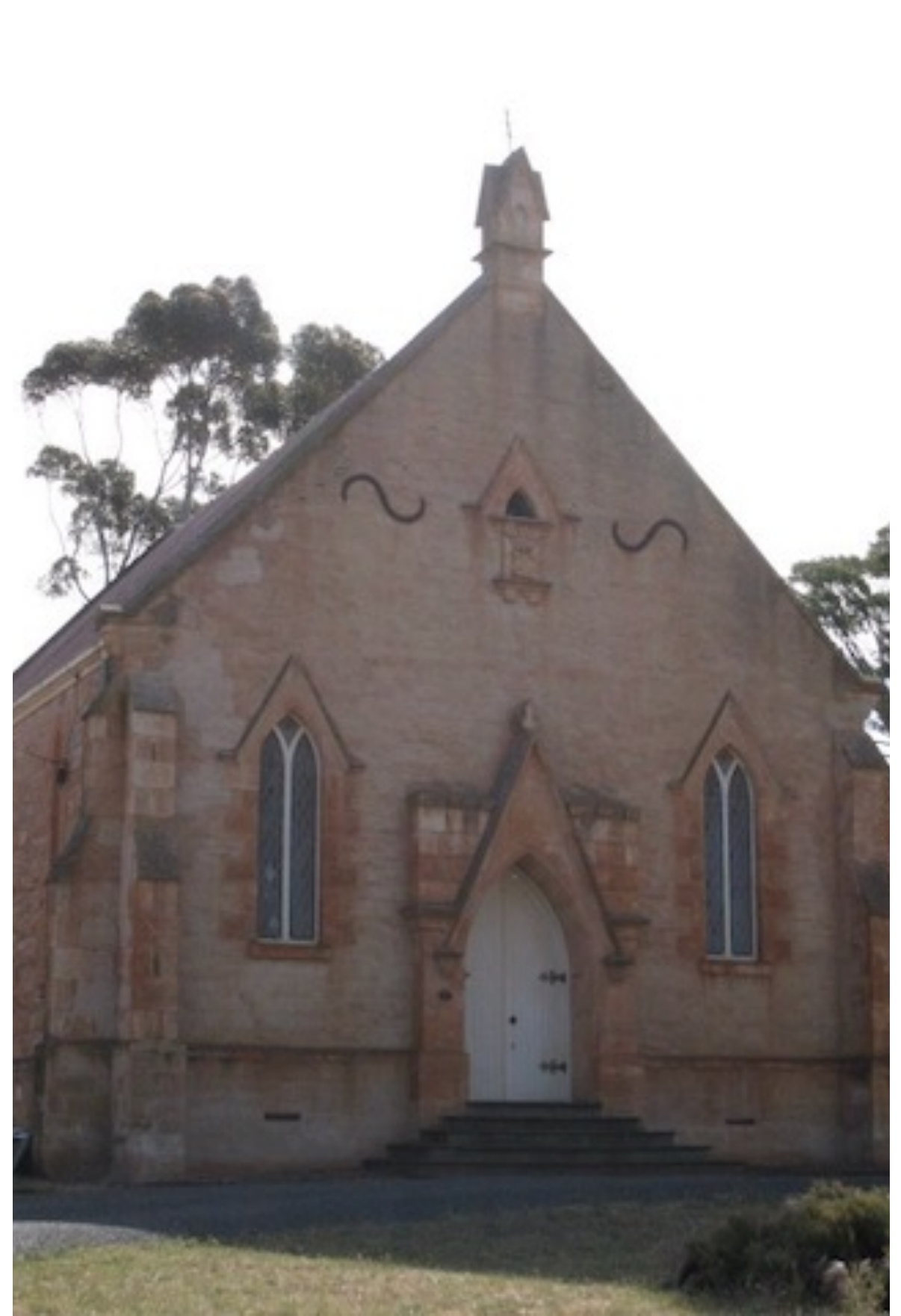
We made another stop for a stroll around **Watervale** before heading back to **Auburn** for a rest before what we expected to be a light dinner.

But appearances are deceptive.

When the packages we'd bought earlier had been placed in bowls, accompanied by a glass of the *Knappstein '05 Three* (a perfect match, by the way), a \$9.50 *Thai beef salad* from **Wild Saffron** proved to be a surprisingly filling meal.





















## South Australia 2008

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# Thursday 6 November

Having decided to make full use of the facilities on offer at the cottage, *Madam* had indulged in a sauna the evening after we arrived.

I'd indicated that I wouldn't mind a ride along the **Riesling Trail** on one of the bikes stored in the shed at the back of the premises.

Yesterday had dawned bleak and drizzly, putting that concept into the Not this morning, Josephine basket.

Still, a cloudless sky took care of any excuses, and I set off around 7:10, planning to ride to **Leasingham** and back before breakfast.

Bearing the fact that I don't recall riding a bike at any point over the past twenty-plus years and that most of the route along that section of the Riesling Trail covered a gentle uphill slope, the news that I didn't quite make it into **Leasingham** mightn't come as a great surprise.



I turned back when I reached the tank farm behind **O'Leary Walker** at the time I'd planned to start the return journey and coasted downhill for much of the way back.

After a shower and breakfast, it was back to **Clare** for the start of what I think is the most overwhelming day's wine tasting I've experienced to date.

The basic plan was to start at **Jim Barry**, pop into **Neagles Rock**, and then side-track across the highway to the **Quarry Hill lookout** and some photos (but no tasting) at historic **Sevenhill Cellars**.

From there we planned to head around the **Spring Gully Loop** to **Skillogalee** for lunch.

After lunch, we'd move on to **Mitchell, Kilikanoon, Olssen** and (maybe) **Crabtree** on the way home.

Ambitious?

Yes, but I thought it was doable with an early start if we were able to space the tasting and slip **Mitchell** (and maybe **Kilikanoon**) in before Skillogalee and lunch.

We weren't out of the blocks as quickly as I would have liked.

It was around ten when we pulled into **Jim Barry**, behind a foursome from **Brisbane** who had some connection to the winery's Queensland distributor and were there for a long and leisurely tasting.

With two groups of tasters and a couple of outside interruptions, we were there quite a bit longer than I'd planned.

That combination of factors produced much more copious tasting notes than I was able to manage elsewhere.

Starting with *Riesling*, the *2008 Watervale* (\$15) was another in the run of fantastic wines that are the valley's trademark.

Anyone minded to quibble is reminded the track running along the former rail line from **Auburn** to **Clare** is the *Riesling Trail* rather than the *Shiraz, Semillon Sauvignon Blanc* or anything else Trail.

Slightly upmarket, *2007 Lodge Hill* (\$18) showed the benefit of bottle age and was quite excellent.

The first knockout punch of the day came with the *2007 Florita* (\$40) a stellar wine made from free-run juice (about 40% of the available volume) that was 100% Riesling without any trace of skin, stem or stalk.

Quite simply, a fantastic wine.

The 2008 *Silly Mid On Sauvignon Blanc Semillon* was always going to pale in comparison.

From there, we moved on to *Lavender Hill* late picked styles, the 2007 *Riesling* (quite beautiful) and the 2006 *Riesling Semillon*, which reminded us of the *Pfeiffer's Late Picked Muscadelle* and was on special at \$30 the 375 mL half dozen.

We broke the *we're not buying anything to carry home* policy and invested in a six-pack.

We started on the reds with 2004 *Three Little Pigs Shiraz Cabernet Malbec* (\$18), nicely peppery with charming label artwork.

The 4/6 label features a pig bowling what appears to be a perfectly flighted leg break!

Questions about cricket references produced the explanation that the family had bought the old Penola Cricket Ground in the Coonawarra.

That's the source of the non-Clare component of *The Cover Drive* (\$18), a blend of Cabernets from Clare and Coonawarra, a classy wine worthy of comparison to the classic shot of batsmanship.

Things were warming up as we got to the 2006 *Lodge Hill Shiraz* (\$18) with three gold medals to its name and great value for the price.







As we moved towards the top of the range the quality, already almost stellar, made a succession of quantum leaps.

The *2005 First XI Cabernet* (100% from Coonawarra \$55) was stunning, and the *Benbourie Cabernet Sauvignon* (100% Clare \$90) was sublime.

With *2005 The McRae Wood Shiraz* things just kept getting better.

By the time we reached the summit (*2005 The Armagh Shiraz* \$195), I'd run out of superlatives.

As we walked out, it was just as well we were about to make a diversion before the next winery.

The palate (and the mind) needed time to clear after what we'd encountered.

We stopped at the lookout atop **Quarry Hill** for a spectacular view over the **Polish Hill River**) and headed on to the **Sevenhill Cellars**.

*Madam* had a wander while I sat in the car trying to gather my thoughts before the next flurry of activity which was going to feature a succession of more five-star wineries.

That was going to be tough, but we weren't planning a return visit that would allow me to visit the ones we missed this time.



















We pulled up at **Neagles Rock** long enough for me to alight so *Madam* could continue over to investigate the **Tourist Information Centre**.

Meanwhile, I made my way past the amiable winery dog and make my way to the Cellar Door.

Tasting kicked off with *NV Chardonnay Pinot Noir* (\$19), an everyday drinking style that'd be worth investing in if we drank more bubbles.

Unfortunately, we still have 4/6 of last year's bubbly purchase on hand, but anyone who drinks this style regularly should find it worth checking out.

Predictably, the *2007 Riesling* (\$19) was yet another classic *Clare Riesling*.

*2007 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc* (\$19) was also excellent though I was inclined to disagree with the suggestion that the Clare Valley does the style just as well as it does *Riesling*.

Maybe I'm biased towards the straight variety rather than the blend.

I found every *Riesling* I tried in the area fitted into a recognisable regional style and, while showing subtle variations, were consistently superb expressions of the style.

Most of the *Semillon Sauvignon Blancs* were outstanding wines though I didn't pick up the same consistency of style.

Or maybe it's just a case of *Hughesy* loves Riesling.

Moving into the reds, *2008 Sweet Dorothy Cabernet Rose* (\$19) was, as the name suggests, a sweeter style than most I'd tried, but that wasn't a problem. Perfect summer drinking (yet again).

The *2006 Grenache Shiraz* (\$20) was smooth and would be almost unrecognisable to anyone who'd cut his teeth on the big Grenaches of yesteryear.

They were on the last stocks of the *2005 Shiraz* (\$25) which was excellent, but you'd need to be quick.



*2006 Sangiovese* (\$25) was excellent with a lovely velvety mouthfeel and every inch the 94-point wine that Halliday rates it as.

The *2006 Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$25) was summed up very nicely in the cellar notes as not shy in any way. At the same time, it's not aggressive. It makes its presence felt without trying to knock your block off.

(**Note:** The Neagles Rock brand seemss to have dropped off the radr. The site I visited is now home to the **Shut the Gate** cellar door operation.)

By this stage it was 11:45 with a circuit around the **Spring Gully Loop** to the **Spring Gully Lookout** as the next item on the itinerary, then another winery (well, maybe two) before lunch.

The **Lookout** wasn't quite what I'd been hoping for.

I thought we'd be looking east across vineyards whereas we ended up looking towards where the sun would set in a few hours.

The time factor, after we'd spent so much longer than planned at **Jim Barry**. I wasn't objecting, but it meant we could only fit in one more winery before lunch.

So we headed over to the old stone apple shed that houses **Mitchell Wines**.





Once we'd finished it wasn't quite time for lunch, but there wasn't time for another, particularly when the next stop was going to be **Kilikanoon**.

Lack of something to scribble on close at hand means I'm relying on memory to describe a relatively quick visit to a winery where I liked everything on offer very much.

The *2006 Watervale Riesling* (\$22) was another in a succession of fantastic wines.

The *2004 GSM Grenache* was excellent, with the S originating from Sangiovese rather than the usual Shiraz.



The quality continued with the *2006 Peppertree Vineyard Shiraz* (\$25), *2004 Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$25) and the stunning *2000 McNicol Shiraz* (\$40).

If that seems to be giving the place short shift when I asked *Madam* for her impression of the place, she suggested that it was probably the best winery we'd visited that day.

When we met the foursome we'd seen at **Jim Barry** over lunch I was quite emphatic.

*They had to visit Mitchell.*

Getting to **Skillogalee** and lunch meant a slight bit of backtracking.

Since we were there slightly before the time we'd booked I tried some of the range.

It was enough to suggest a glass of *Riesling* would go well with lunch.

From the time we were seated under the olive tree, it was evident why we'd been told lunch at **Skillogalee** was a must-do.

It is (not to put too fine a point on it) a lovely spot in a delightful setting.











The views across the vines were divine, and the food was superb.

I had half a dozen *Coffin Bay oysters* from the daily specials (hence the decision to go with a glass of *Riesling*).

Both of us went for *pasta with a creamy prawn and pea sauce* which couldn't possibly be faulted.

Back on the road, we headed to **Kilikanoon**, where I was struck by the contrast between the *2008 'Mort's Block' Riesling* (\$21) and its big brother.

It was another beautiful expression of one of my all-time favourite wine styles.

The *2008 'Mort's Reserve' Riesling* (\$30) is taken from selected rows from the same vineyard.

The difference was more than merely *noticeable*.

I'd be happy to drink the former in any appropriate circumstance while the latter is stunning.

*2007 Barrel Fermented Semillon* (\$18) had picked up buttery characteristics along the way, which was all right with me.

The *2007 Second Fiddle Rose* (\$18) was full-bodied, balanced, and excellent summer wine, as was the *2006 Prodigal Grenache*, another one in the contemporary softer style.

*2005 Medley Grenache Shiraz Mourvedre* was the kind of style that'd be the perfect match for Italian meat or pasta dishes and is the sort of wine that creeps up on you.

Maybe it should carry a label advising caution when approaching the bottle.

*2006 Blocks Road Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$29) wasn't quite my cup of tea, though when she tried a sip *Madam* disagreed.

The *2005 Covenant Shiraz* (\$38) had a lovely long finish though it took quite a bit of swirling in the glass to bring it out.

Small wineries don't come much more interesting than **Olssens of Watervale**, located at the end of a dirt track that might encourage the less fanatical among us to turn back.

My *iPod* note reads *unusual varieties such as Carmenere and Primitivo di Gioia* so turning back wasn't an option unless the road started degenerating into impassability.

Even if it had, I think I might have been tempted to get out and walk.

Again, this was a *no notes taken* episode.

While I liked the whole range, for me the standouts were the ones I came for.



The *2006 BHV Primitivo* (\$35), the *2006 BHV Carmenere* (\$35), the *2005 BHV MMS* (\$25) and *2005 The Olssen Six*, a blend of all six **classic Bordeaux varieties**.

That's something that doesn't happen in Bordeaux any more. They stopped growing *Carmenere* after the phylloxera plague.

We had the time; it was on the way home, so we stopped into **Crabtree Wines** (as much for the view across Watervale as for the tasting opportunity).

I couldn't help myself and wandered into the Cellar Door while *Madam* roamed the hillside taking a few photos.

*2008 Pomona Individual Block Riesling* (\$30) was stunning, a result of the decision to pick and ferment every block of Riesling as a separate package.

One particular parcel stood out, and a mere hundred dozen bottled.

A wine for Riesling fans.

The *2008 Hilltop Riesling* (\$15 cellar door only) was a slightly sweeter early drinking style, and 2008 Watervale Riesling was very much in the traditional Watervale style.

Of the other wines I tried before closing time, *Watervale Zibibbo* would work with spicy food in much the same way as a *Gewurztraminer*.







At the same time, the *2006 Watervale Riesling* was, predictably stellar.

I liked the *2007 Tempranillo* enough to shell out for a bottle in the expectation that we might need something to go with pizza or pasta over the rest of the trip.

Back in Auburn, dining options needed investigating.

A walk around the village revealed the presence of a pizza operation that closed at eight o'clock (last orders half an hour earlier), so we decided to stroll back to the cottage, phone in an order just after seven and have an early night.

And, on the way back, we passed this little reminder that Auburn was the birthplace of the noted Australian poet and humorist **C.J. Dennis**, the man who gave us ***Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*** and ***The Glugs of Gosh***.

His father was a publican. On the corner of the block where the pub stood, a scale model of original building commemorates the site where retired sea captain James Dennis held the liquor licence between 1865 and 1877.

With an old people's home in the background.





## South Australia 2008

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# Friday 7 November

An early night was, as it turned out, the smart option.

Through the night, the wind picked up, not enough to disturb the slumber at first, but in the predawn hours, as the wind howled and the rain swept across in scuds of varying intensity, a warm bed was the place to be.

Somewhere around two, the wind dropped, and the thunder moved in, eerie in the silence and threatening enough to make a return to sleep a problematic proposition.

But with several hours of sleep already under the belt, lying half-awake listening to the rolls of thunder gave me a chance to think back over the previous couple of days.

*Madam's* research activities had, once again, paid off.

She looked at several possibilities before booking us into one of the cottages that operate under the name of **Lavender Blue**.







There are two cottages on site, one (*Tuscany*) occupying the upper level of the premises. The second (*Provence*) is tucked away on the lower level of the 130-year old building on the northern outskirts of **Auburn**.

We've stayed in some similar establishments in a variety of locations over the past few years.

While all of them had their particular strong points, Tuscany was definitely among the very best of them. For some, the fact that the **Main North Road** runs past the front door might be a problem, but the passing traffic noise wasn't enough to disturb a good night's sleep.

Thunder, on the other hand, was a different proposition.

Each morning we'd managed a hearty breakfast from the provisions supplied, and that was after we'd fashioned a light supper out of the supplies on the first night.

There was plenty of room, the view from the upper levels of the building was fantastic, and everything that we needed was on hand, even if an item sometimes took a little finding

A sauna and access to bicycles were a definite bonus as well. If we're back in the area and *Tuscany* is available, I don't see any point in looking elsewhere.







After polishing off the remaining breakfast ingredients, once we'd packed up and loaded the chariot, we headed off for a flying visit to **Annie's Lane**.

After that, we planned to side-track through **Mintaro**, so Someone could get some photos of **Martindale Hall** *en route* to the **Barossa**.

When we arrived at the former **Quelltaler Winery** (nowadays **Annie's Lane**), we learnt the overnight weather had done more than rumble ominously.

Significant power outages between **Clare** and **Auburn** meant we were lucky to have progressed as far as we had.

The morning's breakfast and ironing would have been grossly hampered by lack of power.

The accommodation at *Tuscany* had come with a 20% discount voucher for use at **Annie's Lane**.

That was, to be honest, the primary motivation for a visit (in case we ran across something interesting, you understand).

In the end, I ended up having a cursory taste of what was on offer.

The range didn't seem to be offering anything out of the ordinary, and the wines are widely available and often discounted.

Everything was sound, well-made and perfectly acceptable.

I'd be happy with the *Riesling* if it turned up on a restaurant wine list, for instance.

In our part of the world, that'd be likely, but over the past couple of days, I'd tried several wines that would, in my opinion, be better investments if you're looking at a dozen bottles you're not likely to find at the local bottle shop.





We arrived at **Martindale Hall** to find the gates closed. Since they weren't scheduled to open for another twenty minutes (we were just after a couple of photos) we decided to bid a fond farewell to the **Clare Valley** and make for the winemaking big smoke.

The trip through **Manoora**, **Riverton**, **Tarlee** and **Kapunda** was uneventful apart from a mild degree of concern as to whether the fuel supply would hold out.

Just before midday, we turned off in **Tanunda** in search of parking and information.

On the way, we passed **Penfolds** and a host of other wineries that would be worth a visit, but a quick check in the **Barossa guide book** listed fifty-five wineries.

So, working on, say, five a day we'd be looking at more than a week and a half if we were going to be visiting them all.

As it was, we didn't have a full day at our disposal before the car was due back in **Adelaide**.

In any case, after three days in **Clare**, any suggestion along those lines would have been tantamount to relationship suicide. I'd figured out that we could probably visit two without too much drama.

The question was, under the circumstances, which two?

Which is where the research factor comes in.

Given the numerical constraints, I restricted my research to the places **Mr Halliday** had assigned **five stars**. That meant we were still looking at twenty-one wineries.

It was clear other selection criteria were needed. For a start, there was no way I wanted to pull into somewhere that was, even on Friday afternoon, likely to be packed.

That ruled out some of the higher-profile establishments.

Many years ago I'd had the good fortune to come across a *Shiraz* from **Rockford** and had been continuously on the lookout for any of their wines ever since, with absolutely no success whatsoever.

Since, as far as I can make out, their distribution doesn't extend into our part of the world I figured **Rockford** was one of the two to visit.

I'd also run across several references to **Thorn-Clarke** as one of the rising stars of the Australian wine industry.

Since it was close to the night's accommodation, I thought I'd found the second one.



But that was before I started looking at websites.

Once I'd finished going through those, there was only one choice - **Seppeltsfield**.

For a start, something was lacking in my tasting experience, and the something was the high-quality sherry-style wines produced in Australia.

Looking at the photos on the website, it was apparent the buildings and grounds would provide *Madam* with heritage-oriented photographic interest while I had a taste or two.

Once we'd picked up a guide book and the map, it was time to think about lunch.

Even before the German-accented lady drew a circle around it on the map, *Madam* had decided lunch was going to be a picnic basket from **Maggie Beer's Farm Shop**.

She'd also set her heart on trying the ice-cream there.

We drove out through light drizzle, parked and wandered indoors to find that the picnic basket was an eat-it-here affair of pate, dips and bread.





There was an area where we could taste the pate.

Once we'd made our selection, it was a case of grabbing a table overlooking the lake which, even through the drizzle, was a pleasure to behold.

I'd opted for mushroom pate and a glass of *Beer Brothers Semillon Chardonnay* for lunch, while *Madam's* had the red pepper version and a *non-alcoholic Cabernet*.

Looking at the contents of each little basket, you might feel you'd need a bit more to keep you going for the rest of the day.

But there was just enough to fill the yawning void without leaving you too bloated to be able to fit in a little liquid afterwards.

*Madam* picked up some ice-cream on the way out, planning to give it time to soften a little on the way to nearby **Seppeltsfield**.

On the way, we passed two wineries that my research suggested could well be worth visiting, but the game plan brooked no variation.

Approaching **Seppeltsfield** *Madam* was impressed by the hilltop **Seppelt Family Mausoleum** looking out across the valley, and by the avenues of huge ancient-looking date palms along the way.

A pause in the precipitation gave me a chance to duck into the tasting room while *Madam* sat in the car with the ice-cream.

Safely inside the tasting area, I took a stroll around the museum displays.

Having been sold off by **Fosters**, **Seppeltsfield** is now owned by the same interests as **Kilikanoon**.





In the processes involved with the sale, the stocks of table wines were separated from the fortified stocks.

So there were table wines available to taste, but they would be much the same as some of the range I'd sampled at **Kilikanoon** the day before.

In any case, I wasn't there for the table wines.

The starting point on the fortified trail was the *Flora Fino* (500mL \$22), absolutely bone dry and an excellent aperitif or a delightful accompaniment to tapas.

It was made from *Palomino*, as was the *Clara Blanca Amontillado* (500 mL \$20), a wine which had, believe it or not, sixteen years in wood.

And it showed. The third sherry on offer was the *Vera Viola Oloroso*, a semi-sweet wine that is, or so I was told, more in the Spanish style.

These are wines that are flying under the radar as far as popular taste in Australia is concerned. In a way, you'd almost hope they stay that way and never make a comeback.

If that were to be the case, the aficionados might be able to quietly enjoy sipping away at some exquisite styles without breaking the bank.





But, on the other hand, there's a danger they'll disappear altogether if producing them becomes less attractive to the bean-counters who are starting to rule the roost in the upper echelons of the significant wine concerns.

However, now I know what I've been missing, I'll be doing my bit to sustain them in the future.

On the *Tawny* side of things the *Cellar No. 7* (\$20, average age of five years) was a light style that doesn't need a log fire on a cold winter night while the *Para Grand Tawny* (\$26) with an average age of ten years was wonderfully complex.

The sale of the winery and its vast stocks of unfashionable fortified wine meant the new owners acquired substantial supplies of *Rutherglen Muscat* and *Tokay*.

As a lover of both, there was no way I was going to be walking out without sampling what was on offer.

The *Cellar No. 6 Tokay* and *Cellar No. 8 Muscat* (both \$20) were excellent examples of the younger version of these great Rutherglen styles, while the *Grand Tokay* and *Grand Muscat* (both 500mL \$32) were just superb.

The ownership shakeout has resulted in changes to names and labelling, but someone wandering into a bottle shop to find something under the **Seppelts** label at around the same price point will probably be looking at the same product.







Back in the car, we made our way back to and through Tanunda on the way to my other must-visit winery, **Rockford Wines** in **Krondorf Road**.

Arriving at the stonewalled compound *Madam* decided she liked the look of the place.

That impression was reinforced as we walked into the tasting room, which had the look and feel of an ancient cellar rather than some modern architect's self-indulgent showcase.

Which is the way I like it.

These places are supposed to be all about the wine.

Multimillion-dollar winery complexes are all very well, but you can't help suspecting a showy exterior may be an attempt to distract you from the wine. And the wines were stunning.

*2006 Hand Picked Eden Valley Riesling* (\$19) was excellent. Loads of flavour, lovely finish, a match for anything we'd tried over the previous couple of days.

Even better was the *2004 Local Growers Semillon*, an aged style that, in the words of the cellar door tasting notes *invites itself to lunch*. At \$18, I suspect I'll be inviting some into the wine rack.







The *2008 White Frontignac* (\$15.50) had a touch of sweetness without being cloying, much like the *Gewurztraminers* we'd tried in *Clare*, and was another wine that would go well with spicier dishes.

Moving on to the red side of things, the *2008 Alicante Bouchet* is a lovely light summer red, an almost ideal Rose style without any sweetness. One to chill and chill out over while nibbling on a Christmas/New Year lunch. One of my first acts on returning home was to order a case.

The *2004 Moppa Springs* (47% *Grenache*, 40% *Mataro* 13% *Shiraz* \$23.50) was nicely complex with a fantastically rounded mouth-feel and a joy to swirl slowly around the palate. One to savour.

The *2005 Rod & Spur* (\$29.50), named for the traditional pruning method, was a huge wine that took absolutely no prisoners but was surprisingly mild for its size.

The *2005 Rifle Range Cabernet Sauvignon* was another big, full-bodied style with real *Cabernet* character, enormous and earthy but still mild with it. Fantastic.

It isn't usually available for tasting, but there was an opened bottle of the *2001 Shiraz VP* (\$62.50), so we had a chance to try a stunning wine that should last for years.

One to buy and lay down for a 50th birthday (assuming you have offspring born in 2001).

Or maybe those of us born in '51 might think about laying one down if we're confident of making it to the century mark.



I was more than happy with the state of the world when we headed away from **Rockford**, following the **Scenic Heritage Drive**.

Since the conditions didn't favour sightseeing *Madam* suggested I might like to visit another winery.

That provided an opportunity to readmit **Thorn-Clarke** to the tasting schedule.

The winery, located east of **Angaston**, is slightly out of the way.

As we pulled into the car park, I wondered, surveying the list of mining-related companies beside the door, whether we'd come to the right place.

But once we'd been directed to the door on our left, it was evident that we had.

The *Thorn-Clarke* core range (\$15) comprised consistently excellent wines, starting with the *2007 Sandpiper Riesling*, a cool-climate style made from Eden Valley fruit.

The *2007 Sandpiper Pinot Gris* was, predictably, in the French rather than the Italian style with strong pear flavours.

The *2006 Sorriso Rose*, a blend of Nebbiolo and Cabernet was a dry, easy-drinking style. Another one for a summer afternoon.

Of the core range reds *2007 Sandpiper Shiraz* ticked all the right boxes, and *2007 Sandpiper Cabernet Sauvignon* was an excellent easy-drinking wine.

So was the *2005 Sandpiper The Blend* (*Shiraz, Petit Verdot* and *Cabernet Franc*).

Further up the price range in the premium wines, *2007 Shotfire Chardonnay* (\$20) was on the buttery side of the spectrum (the style I like).

The *2007 Pinot Gris* (\$20) was surprisingly similar despite the fact it hadn't had the malolactic fermentation that usually leads to those characters. Interesting.

From there it was a matter of checking into the accommodation at the **Vineyards Motel**.

It's an unprepossessing establishment that had the advantage of being across the road from **Vintners Restaurant**, the venue we'd selected for dinner.

We could head in much the same direction to check out the Saturday morning **Farmers' Markets** on the morrow.

Dinner was an enjoyable and relaxed affair, involving the *chicken* and *kangaroo* dishes from the daily specials.





We'd got there before the rush (just as well, since we hadn't bothered to book).

The lingering daylight gave us something to look across as we pondered the menu and wine list.

I chose a glass of *Tin Shed Cabernet Franc* (\$9) to go with the 'roo, though the most memorable part of the evening came after we'd started the walk home.

The walk quickly became a run as we crossed Stockwell Road, pursued by rain.

Admittedly, the weather had been threatening to do something more than drizzle all day, but the Weather Gods had just about timed it to perfection.

We were almost precisely at the midpoint between the restaurant and the motel when the heavens opened.

And they opened quite substantially.

Fortunately, the half-way point only had a few metres on either side.



## South Australia 2008

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# Saturday 8 November

With the winery-oriented part of the odyssey concluded, in the morning the main cause for concern was the direction the weather might take rather than the direction we'd be taking to the nearest vineyard.

When I peeked outside things looked overcast and unpromising (at least as far as sightseeing was concerned), but we ventured back across **Stockwell Road** towards the **Farmers' Market**.

Predictably, as soon as we were actually inside the old **Vintners Pty. Ltd.** warehouses the rain decided to take a temporary break.

Like most blokes, I've missed acquiring the shopping gene, so I'm not over-big on markets, but *Madam* likes to browse, so I wandered in her wake.

There wasn't much in the arts and craft line, and most of what was there could have been interesting if we were staying longer, and the accommodation had cooking facilities.











While I would have liked to pick up some of the delicacies on offer (*Thai duck sausages*?) common sense prevailed.

We ended up leaving with a variety of baked delicacies for breakfast with a couple of lightweight items (*olive oil* and *dukkah*) and jam for *Madam's* breakfast at the **Little House of Concrete**.

With breakfast out of the way, there wasn't much to keep us unless I took up the suggestion that I might choose to visit a vigneron.

That would have involved making a decision, and I was just about tasted out, so we hit the frog and toad selecting the scenic route into **Adelaide** via **Eden Valley**, **Mount Pleasant**, the **Big Rocking Horse** at **Gumeracha** and the **North East Road**.

Predictably, once we'd been to the **Eden Valley Lookout** and decided that there was no point in taking photos, the weather improved.

During a short break at the **Big Rocking Horse**, I took the time to reassure myself about the route into downtown **Adelaide**.

On the way out of the city four days earlier, *Madam* had remarked on the driver-friendly layout of the city.





I was inclined to agree as we found our way into the city centre along a very easy-to-follow route.

We were refuelling the car at the servo around the corner from the **Hertz depot** at around eleven-fifteen.

Once the car had been returned, I'd been hoping actual or impending rainfall would give us an excuse not to hoof it over five or six blocks to the **Hotel Grand Chancellor**.

But that wasn't to be so we set off with *Hughesy* lugging the luggage as *Madam* led the way.

A sudden change of direction resulted in remaining handle on *Madam's* sports bag snapping (t'other had decided to break en route to **Meleden Villa**), which complicated matters.

Checking in incorporated inquiries about places where we could buy a replacement.

Once the purchase had been accomplished, we were at a loose end apart from mundane matters like finding a venue for lunch.

We settled on an upstairs Italian eatery where my *lasagne* was dwarfed by *Someone Else's* order of *calamari with chips and salad*.



As we paid the bill, I spotted a consequence of anti-smoking legislation currently stalking the nation.

A notice stated that, because of the number of patrons stepping outside for a ciggie and then failing to return, customers requiring a nicotine fix were required to lodge their wallet, credit card or car keys as a deposit.

We took our time walking back to the hotel through the **Rundle Street Mall** and got back to base around three.

That gave me time to catch up on the travel journal while *Madam* rested before a late afternoon stroll to scope out the neighbourhood.



A phone call advised us the planned dining arrangements were a late scratching, so we wandered off around six looking for an interesting option in the **Hindley Street** end of town.

We settled on **Le Corner Bistrot**, managing to grab the last available table in a classy establishment offering French cuisine in the classic style.

I opted for one of the daily specials, a *mushroom vol au vent*, and an *entrecote and green pepper sauce*, while *Madam* went for a main course of ocean trout.

When the *vol au vent* appeared I was surprised to find the pastry layered over and under the mushroom filling rather than encasing it.

But it tasted superb, and the sauce gave us something to talk about while we waited for the mains to arrive

That took some time since the place had filled since our arrival and the kitchen wasn't exactly the most spacious one you've seen.

The mains were, however, well worth the wait.

We wandered room-wards pleasantly sated with ***Iron Chef***, ***Rockwiz*** and ***Crabtree Tempranillo*** to look forward to.



## South Australia 2008

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# Sunday 9 November

Sunday morning found us setting out on a morning constitutional a little later than planned, thanks to a good night's sleep.

We spent a pleasant couple of hours wandering in and around **North Terrace**, **Adelaide Oval** and the **Botanic Gardens** before ending up in the **Rundle Mall Markets** where we met up with some of *Madam's* Adelaide-resident Japanese acquaintances.

While we were there, *Madam* found the Thai fisherman's pants she'd been looking for and, once seated in **Scoozi**; she had the opportunity to catch up with old friends while *Hughesy* took a long look at the wine by the glass list

That meant lunch turned out to be a lengthy indulgence involving a variety of dishes.













While the Japanese conversation was intelligible, the wines were speaking a language I comprehended.

*Eden Valley Riesling* (\$6.50), *Rockford Alicante Bouchet* (\$7) and *Coriole McLaren Vale Sangiovese* (\$6.50) kept me amused while I sat and ran through the next round of journal entries in my mind.

Once we'd finished lunch and bade farewell to *Madam's* friends it was time to head for the tram to **Glenelg**, so She could catch up with a few of her old haunts from long ago.

The landscape, or more accurately, the skyline around **Glenelg** had changed.

It had changed so much that, after a stroll to the end of the jetty, we were on the way back to the city.

We took a walk around the **Central Market** area and the **Gouger Street** restaurant precinct instead.

Back at the hotel, we had time for *Madam* to watch ***The Movie Show*** before the compulsory viewing of ***The Einstein Factor*** and once those were out of the way, a visit to the **Tandoori Mahal** before an early night.





## South Australia 2008

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# Monday 10 November

Monday's game plan, with us flying north in the afternoon, was based on opportunities for *Madam* to catch up with friends with *Hughesy* indulging in activities that would kill time.

Those were supposed to involve wandering around bookstores and CD shops.

After I picked up a couple of titles I just had to have, reluctance to spend anything beyond what was strictly necessary saw me sitting around cooling my heels while I waited for departure time.

If that sounds a bit extreme, the reader needs to remember that straight after the book shop, I wandered into a CD store. I could easily have spent a couple of hundred dollars filling gaps in the music collection.



On that basis, I was better off avoiding unnecessary temptation and challenging decisions.

After all, I had **Inspector Montalbano** to keep me amused.

I caught up with *Madam* and an online acquaintance in the coffee shop at the **Hilton** and induced a minor dose of excitement by announcing **Gamba Osaka** soccer team's luggage was being unloaded in front of the hotel.

I started reading, taking a break every so often to wander around, deftly avoiding be suited fit-looking Japanese scattered around the premises and talking animatedly into mobile phones.

We walked across to **Gouger Street** for *yum cha*, caught up with one of *Madam's* ex-colleagues over *gelato* and, thanks to an unexpected offer of a lift to the airport, found ourselves cooling our heels waiting for check-in to open.

**Adelaide Airport** is an impressive facility.

Still, I wish someone had reminded the architect who designed the place that passengers waiting for check-in to open might be there because they don't have much choice in the matter.

That means they *might* appreciate something to sit on.

Once we'd separated ourselves from the luggage, there wasn't a great deal to do that didn't involve enjoying the view across to the **Adelaide Hills** from the **Coopers' Ale House** and a snack before the boarding call.

Aboard, I immersed myself in **The Patience of the Spider**.

Some three hours later, back on *terra firma* once we'd reclaimed the belongings, it was time to see about a shuttle from the airport to the unit.

It wasn't the speediest of transfers, but once we were back where the **Adelaide** leg of the trip effectively started, there wasn't a great deal to do until the time came to resume the northward journey two days later.