

again. No more trouble until the Alice, when a low-speed erratic miss made me suspect bad points. Hans, the German mechanic at the combination VW-Land Rover agency, took care of that and a few other minor problems.

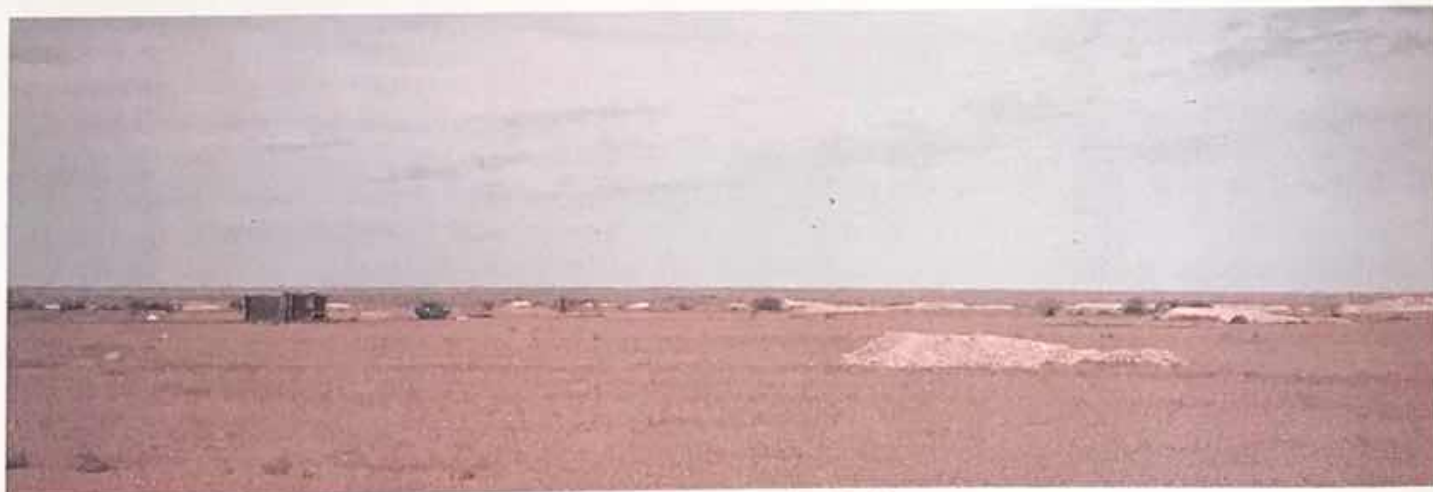
Coober Pedy's Crime Wave

Coober Pedy, in south-central Australia, is a busy, dusty, crazy spot on the great map of desert, where dozens of tough, tanned, independent men from all over the world gather to compete at taking opals out of the dry clay soil. Most of the residents live in underground "dugouts" because of the summer heat, or they did so when we were there in 1969. Water is purified from bore fluid by what, in the Australian fashion, is described as "the biggest solar still in the world."

Around Coober Pedy the Aborigines include some small people with blonde streaks in their hair. Near the town many of them live in a collection of wrecked automobiles. The name "Coober Pedy" is touted as an Aboriginal word meaning "White Man's Hole in the Ground."

Lorrie, Susan, Nancy, and I arrived in Coober Pedy on Good Friday. When we went into that huge cavernous pub and restaurant (above ground), some 50 men and five women were in there, mostly drinking beer and yarning up a storm. My females got some whistles, and they caused a lot of chairs to change position. Some time before that Dan Otte, Ann Pace, and I had approached Coober Pedy as far as Kingoonyah, and some travelers had told us about a rhubarb in Coober Pedy over a stolen drum of water. I put some of these things together and wrote the following verse after our visit to the town. It's some sort of a cousin to *The Shooting of Dan McGrew* and it can be sung to the same tune.

Except for a few details, this story could have been true. It's easy to observe scenes in Coober Pedy that match all of those in the verse. There really was a "Coober Pedy Supplies," and a black-haired, fair-skinned lass (sheila, bird) passing out tucker (food) and petrol (gasoline). And there really were Aussie and Krauts, Italians and Greeks, Abos' pups, Land Rovers covered with ochre dust, and all the rest.



Opel mines at Coober Pedy

The Coober Pedy Pub

In the Coober Pedy Pub a mob of miners was whooping it up;
The New Australian that owned the joint was chasing an Abo's pup.
The dark-skinned girl who served the beer was being whistled on the left and the right,
While the music box blared its message into the heat of the desert night.

There were fifty and five in that gloomy dive, and five of the lot wearing skirts,
And two of those were the waitresses and three no more than flirts.
When a woman stirred, one hundred eyes were fixed on every move,
And the air was taut as each man thought of what the night might prove.

There were Aussies and Krauts, Italians and Greeks, caught up in the get-rich greed,
Lean, hard men from the ends of the earth, a tough and lonesome breed.
With the hemisphere wrong and the climate reversed, and opals instead of gold,
T'was a scene from the Malemute Saloon and the perilous days of old.

To enjoy one's life with the least of strife, this country was scarcely the place
T'was more like a tomb in the red desert's womb reaching out for the whole human race.
In a town like this if a man had to piss, with water five quid for a drum,
He'd be kind to his mate just to bottle it straight and preserve it for droughts yet to come.

There was one dusty street where the Abos could meet to chatter and fight the flies,
And share their drinks and any old thing that a welfare check might buy,
Until dizzy with grog and trailed by their dogs, a pack of flea-bitten hounds,
They'd stagger back to the pile of wrecks where they lived on the edge of town.

Across from the mines hung a crooked old sign saying, "Coober Pedy Supplies,"
Where tucker and petrol could be secured from a lass with azure eyes
And raven black hair and a skin so fair that it scarce could have witnessed the sun,
But the story was told that her man kept his hold by the judicious threat of a gun.

This black-haired bird at the store, I'd heard, was the wife of an ill-tempered Kraut,
And some of the blokes had been making up jokes what would go if the Kraut let her out,
When a miner burst in and wagged his chin, and an ominous hush filled the room,
For it seemed that some dealer had stolen the Sheila and the two had lit out for Kingoon'.

From my window seat I could see the street, and the breath just then caught in my throat,
When a Land Rover covered with ochre dust slammed up and spewed out this bloke
With a beard as long and black and dirty as sin by any name,
And he came through the door in one smooth move, and he closed it behind in the same.

He stood by the door and he glowered the room o'er, and every man's eyes shifted down,
As if each one felt that he shared in the guilt, or his lecherous thoughts might be found.
One man tried to explain but the Kraut just looked pained, and bitterly barked at the bum,
"Oh, bugger the bird, I'm after the cow that pilfered my last water drum!"

Coober Pedy's Crime Wave

G D7 C G

In the Coo-ber Pe - dy Pub a mob of mi - ners was who-op - in up.

C G C A7

The New Aus - tral - ian that owned the joint was chas - in' an A - bo's

D7 G D7

pup. The dark - skinned girl who served the beer was

C G C

get - ting whist-led on the left and the right While the mu - sic box

G D7 G

blared its mes - sage in to the heat of the des - ert night.



Coober Pedy Supplies, South Australia

Coober Pedy to the Alice

When we were in Coober Pedy, Aboriginals were streaming in and out of the liquor store carrying large bottles of wine tucked under their coats and inside pockets in ludicrous fashions, hiding up to one-gallon sizes from their friends. Watching them gave the impression that once the bottle was spotted they were compelled to share it. As long as they could keep it hidden they seemed to feel no compunction to