

up near an almost prone dead mulga tree, its butt partly buried in the desert soil. This I was sure would make an excellent fire, particularly since it had double trunks a few inches apart. A fire built between those trunks, I thought, would still be alive in the half-buried portion when we dragged ourselves out into the chill of the desert morning. To my dismay, after walking around checking the position of the vehicle with my compass in regard to morning sunlight, and attending to another detail off in the darkness, I found that Dan had built our fire about five feet away from that mulga tree. I remarked on the advantages of the tree fire, and he concurred with a shrug. But when I suggested moving the fire, he said, "Why?" Because I had already tried to answer that question, the impasse seemed definite enough to require no more probing. I am quite sure that I should have left "well enough" alone. But after a moment of hesitation, I gritted my teeth and transferred two flaring sticks to the mulga tree, and soon I had a beautiful second fire burning down into its butt. For about an hour the two of us watched our separate fires. I admit to moving my eyes back and forth between them, but my observations definitely support the theory that Dan's eyes were forbidden to leave his own fire. Nevertheless, that tree butt burned all night, and was a mass of beautiful red embers at dawn when I got up to tape-record a butcher bird. It was by that fiery tree stump -- the final campfire of our 46,000-mile, 12-month Land Rover trip -- that the two of us had our morning cups of coffee, and for the last time we warmed our chilly bottoms somewhere in what was thought of as the far-away Outback of Western Australia. Fortunately, that was our last campfire.

The Kumarina Pub

In Western Australia in 1969, returning from the Kimberley Mountains on the dirt track of the alternating bone-jarring corrugations and suffocating bulldust that Australians call the Great Northern Highway, Dan and I experienced everything mentioned above, and in this next verse. It is difficult to convey the flavor of such experiences in an environment as unlike Outback Australia, as is most of the United States. For one thing the places mentioned by name in this tale are often little more than a petrol pump and a pub standing alone out on the desert, or a sheep station with a few corrugated iron shacks. As an example, alongside the track followed during this adventure, we saw an awkwardly cut, battered chunk of sheet metal cut out of an old Shell sign and painted with faded letters that only barely said, "Meekatharra, 410 miles." In between were the Kumarina Pub, a sheep station named Roy Hill, and, as we would learn, not much else.



I sing The Kumarina Pub to a variation of the tune to *Bill Venero*.

In April last me mate and I were on the western track
Of Australia's Northern Highway to the Kimberleys and back,
From the crossing of the Fitzroy we kept our throttle on the floor,
For keen we were to see our homes and families once more.

Before the night was gone we came upon a campfire in the road,
And a lonesome bloke beside an upturned truck without its load;
In the darkness there he told us that his mate had gone to sleep,
And he'd rolled her in the bulldust of the Eighty Mile Beach.

He said he'd been there seven hours, without water, friends, or food,
While his mate was being taken on to hospital at Broome.
We took some cans of Tom Piper, you'd have thought that they were gold;
He set two beside the fire, and ate the other one stone cold.

With the dawning we could hear the desert magpie warbling clear,
And we wished that we could help the Whim Creek camel drink his beer.
With a petrol stop at Hedland, steak and eggs at Marble Bar,
By night again we knew that Nullagine could not be far.

South of Roy Hill we were waved down in the darkness and the wet
Of the highway after midnight by a truckie we had met.
His rig was old and shaky, ochre mud from stem to stern,
But he walked up to my window as he gave his head a turn.

"It's rain from here to Meekatharra, the Shire Council's met,
And the Pub at Kumarina is as far as you will get."
We knew the coastal road was washed out, we'd no cause to turn about,
So we slipped her into four-wheel, and we kept on grinding south.

At the Kumarina Pub we found a howling, shoving mob;
There were truckies, tourists, hangers-on, and the jukebox's steady throb.
The Publican's grin and the dart game never faltered through it all,
"Excuse me, mayte, or I moight pin yer shoulder to the wall!"

Inside we met a lady pressing close on fifty years;
She moved among the patrons, calling all the truckies dears.
She wiggled and she giggled, and she tossed her yellow hair,
And declared of carnal knowledge she was innocent and pure.

The mud around the pub was filled with trucks and Holden Utes,
Land Rovers and Toyoters, and the tourists' cars were beauts.
By the verandah someone parked a load of crazy wild range bulls;
They stomped and fought and splattered all who chanced to wander close.

When a mud-smear'd young Italian brought his rig in with a lurch,
All the tourists gathered round him to receive the latest words:
He'd bogged his truck and stuffed the clutch, the engine now was froze,
And a bloke there shook his head and said, "He's too green for these roads.

There was one man raised a question, if this road was graded well,
Why the rain kept lyin' in it like a bloody deep canal?
And someone volunteered, "The bloke who runs the grader here
Mightn't be the little toenail on a highway engineer!"

There were two blokes in a bus equipped for running outback tours
We'd seen them in the Kimberleys loaded down with teenage girls
They were empty now except for food and cold Australian beer
And they called us in to share it where the air was cool and clear

We watched a yellow pickup truck, as three Poms sweltered in the sun
Their windows tightly closed against the bushflies' steady hum
When a clever fly got in, they found a can and sprayed the air
And a bloke said, "Do you wonder what the country's got to fear?"

For three more days we sat and watched the outhouse overflow,
While the Publican stayed happy with his quota on the go;
At three p. m. the word came that the road was soft but clear,
And from the assembled multitude there came a rousing cheer.

Well, you should have seen those tourists racing for their flaming loads:
Each one was sure the others would tear up the flaming roads.
A lady in a Humber passed up everything in sight;
"That first big pond'll stop her," said me mate and he was right.

They announced there was a limit what the council would allow:
The lightweight trucks and cars could go, but the rest must wait for now.
We smirked to rag our tour bus friends and scurried for our truck,
But in the dark those rascals passed us, speeding through forbidden muck.

Midnight in Meekatharra, and we were gathered once again
Savoring food and drink as heavenly as we had ever seen
We took our leave but Tom and Bob stayed to dally through the night
Proud to have sneaked their monster bus through the alleys with no lights.

Beside the road to Perth we paused to build our best and final fire
In a great half-buried log that would burn the sun into the sky
Before the breaking of the dawn there came a rumbling slamming roar
And that monster slashed the desert night at eighty miles per.

I have traveled forty thousand miles of Australia's Great Outback,
From Queensland's northern mountains to the Southern Bight and back.
And, so help me, I would give Aladdin's Lamp a little rub
To relive those three days waiting at the Kumarina Pub.

The Kumarina Pub

In Ap - ril last me mate and I were on the wes - tern track. Of Aus - tra - lias Nor -
them High - way to the Kim - ber - leys and back. From the Fitz - roy head -
ing south - ward with our throt - tle on the floor For keen we were to see our homes
and fam - il - ies once more.

The little head gesture made by the truckie who hailed us after midnight was exactly like that given by the farmers where I grew up in Illinois. That truckie suggested we might like to pause and pray for drought, and I originally used that line in the song, later substituting the one about the coastal road, which we knew to be completely washed out. I remember that head shake from childhood. I saw it several times, most clearly in a neighbor, an Illinois farmer named Howard "Doc" Wilson. It was a sympathetic gesture that seemed to say, "I don't know any more about it than you do, but I'm with ye, mayte!"

In my Australian journal I also said that the man who spoke up critically about the grading of the road had complained that the fellow who ran the grader mightn't be "the little toenail" on a highway engineer. But that's not the part of the anatomy to which he actually referred.

Final Return to Perth

It was sad to return to Perth and know that we would not be going out in the Land Rover again. It had begun to seem like our little traveling home, and I knew I would regret leaving it behind. But there was consolation in remembering that our Land Rover would be taken over by two other entomologists, Dr. Howard Evans and his post-doctoral research associate, who together would carry out a year-long study of ground-nesting wasps in Australia.

During our last few weeks, Dan and I strove mightily to increase our understanding of the specimens we had collected. We worked in the office kindly provided by Bert Main at the University of Western Australia, and we used their microscopes. Just before leaving we traveled by plane to the museums in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, and Brisbane, examining type specimens (each an individual that represents and verifies an entire species) and securing all possible distribution records.

On this final plane-hopping trip through the eastern museums, Dan and I frequently had an evening on our hands because, except in Canberra, we were not permitted to work in the museums at night. So we systematically took in every movie that we had not already seen. Sometimes we were hard-pressed to find one that looked interesting, and in Brisbane we were once forced to settle for an American film called "MacKenna's Gold." In the lobby of the theater we were amused by two Americans who had evidently just arrived, perhaps soldiers on R&R or workers for oil drillers off the Queensland coast. In any case they