

## REMINISCENCES FROM DOWN UNDER

by Toto Walker

*Editor's note: In the hot summer of 1933, I looked up one day to see the smiling face of Toto Walker looking out from the driver's seat of a Ward Baking Company delivery truck.. He was learning the bakery business in Philadelphia, while I was learning the shipping business, counting bags of coconuts as they came off Grace Line ships at Pier 40 South. We had some good times together. I prevailed upon Toto (now known as Howell to his wife and non-Princeton friends) to put down highlights of his subsequent years.*

—Bob Keidel

Brief exposure to New York's financial district and a few weeks with a Philadelphia baking company dispelled any enthusiasm I may have had for a business career. So early in 1934, I set out to rough my way around the world. Two years later the National Geographic Society hired me on probation for six months. Nearly 40 years later I retired from the National Geographic and moved to Australia, where I still live with my Australian wife, Sheila, whom I'd met and married in Sydney in 1942.



To travel by train from Mukden to Peiping in 1934 took roughly 30 hours. It seemed even longer in 3rd class as I sat on the floor to keep my head below window level. I'd been warned we'd be passing through bandit country. That's when roughing my way around the world began to lose some of its enchantment.

Anyway, in Peiping I treated myself to a first-class hotel. Walking through the lobby my first day there, I was amazed to run into classmate Rem Brinckerhoff. He was staying elsewhere and had come in only to telephone while his rickshaw waited outside. What a fortuitous meeting it was! We spent the next two weeks seeing Peiping and then shipped over to Japan for another fortnight.

Before he headed home via the Trans-Siberian Railway and Europe, we agreed to meet again in Scandinavia in a year's time. Which, in fact, we did. At Gothenberg's Swedish-American quay one bright June morning in 1935, I joined the hundreds of people to welcome the M. S. Kungsholm. The crowd, controlled by mounted police, were straining to catch a glimpse of Greta Garbo coming ashore, while I watched for Rem Brinckerhoff. We bicycled together in Norway and Sweden, lost each other in Sweden (taking different ways at a fork in the road), and remet weeks later in Amsterdam. Eventually Rem had to return to law school in New York. I continued riding my bicycle and trains in Europe until the end of 1935.

Back in Washington, I went to work in the National Geographic's photographic laboratory. As the lowest man on the photo pole, I fetched blocks of ice to keep the developer at 68° F, washed and trimmed prints and ran errands.—“Hop out and get me a pack of Camels, Walker”. Over weekends I was allowed to practise with old photographic equipment. I familiarized myself with handheld cameras like the 4" x 5" Graflex and Speed Graphic, and the 35mm Leica.

Then came an official photographic assignment—to illustrate an article on the Adirondacks. Rem Brinckerhoff joined me there

for a canoe trip along the deceptively named Bog River—a wild stream flowing through unspoiled country between Sabattis and Tupper Lake. In addition to camping gear and provisions, the canoe was overloaded with expensive photographic equipment. We were paddling effortlessly downstream at twilight when the song of a hermit thrush was lost in what sounded like the noise of a waterfall. As it grew louder, we tried to head for the shore. But the current was too strong, sweeping the canoe closer and closer to the brink. We jumped overboard into chest-high water, and tried to drag the canoe ashore. Since this didn't work, we decided, instinctively I guess, to hang on until the very last moment. And at the moment of truth the heavy-laden canoe wedged itself firmly between unseen rocks at the top of the waterfall. While one of us kept the craft streamlined, the other, struggling against the current, carried the cargo to safe ground.

It was exquisitely restful to sit by our evening campfire, sipping the cognac Rem had thoughtfully provided. I can still see that bottle of Bisquit Dubouché reflecting the glow of the embers. And I can still muse on the course of my life had I lost all that expensive equipment in the Bog River. To have lost the cognac too...Quelle catastrophe!

Life flowed along another river—the Saguenay. When I was there in 1938, a century after the first French settlers arrived, the Saguenay still marked Quebec's northern fringe of civilization. My assignment to report on the region's centennial celebrations gave me a chance to write as well as illustrate an article.

The following year I went to France for the best and happiest, and saddest, of assignments; saddest because I had to leave when the count down for World War II began. Gendarmes started watching me and my cameras, frowning at the German-made Leica. "Get over to neutral Ireland" was, in effect, the message from Washington.

I stayed in Eire long enough to gather material for an article on that appealing land and its people. Actually, I had little choice of when I should leave.

War had severely disrupted trans-Atlantic travel; passenger ships between Ireland and America vanished like peat smoke in a brisk sea breeze. In the end I got aboard the S. S. Iroquois, her lifeboats swinging clear all the way to New York. No submarine attack, and I was home for Christmas. The raid on Pearl Harbor happened while I was in Australia. After a year as a war correspondent in the southwest Pacific area, I joined the U.S. Fifth Air Force with a direct commission. By way of New Guinea and the Phillipines, I ended up in occupied Japan.

In 1946, I returned to Washington and the National Geographic. After a spell of domestic assignments, including a trip around the United States by bus, overseas assignments took me mainly to Europe and the Pacific region. Europe meant getting back to France to live in Normandy, Brittany, Paris, Auvergne, and the South; learning about Belgium; seeing bits of Britain; enjoying Mediterranean shores from Gibraltar to Genoa and beyond. In the Pacific, it was half a year in New Zealand; three weeks on tiny Canton Island; extended stays in Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia.

There was an eight-month-long expedition to Arnhem Land in northern Australia (see picture), sponsored by the National Geographic, the Smithsonian and the Australian government. Main objectives of the expedition, consisting of ten Australians and five Americans, were to study and photograph the Stone Age aborigines of this vast but little explored area east of Darwin, along with its animal, insect, plant and marine life.

Finally I began to spend more and more time in Washington as an issue editor. I had long thought of retiring to France. Where else? Sheila, who had never relinquished her Australian passport, understandably wanted to be near family and friends on her native heath. We moved in 1975 to Australia. Not far from Sydney I live with the best of companions—my wife and my books—on the edge of a wood where I like to walk and remember things past.



*Above: Writer-photographer Toto Walker at his home in Sydney, March 1988.*

*Left: In Arnhem Land, North Australian wilderness in 1948. Note aboriginal paintings on the walls of his bedroom-office, and mosquito net suspended from the branch over his cot.*

Sarasota Snaps—March 1990



*Swat Brown, just married within the week, and Ceil as she was being welcomed into the Class of 1933.*



*Treasurer Bill Hewson and Florida Regional Chairman Sid Mathews, in conference.*